

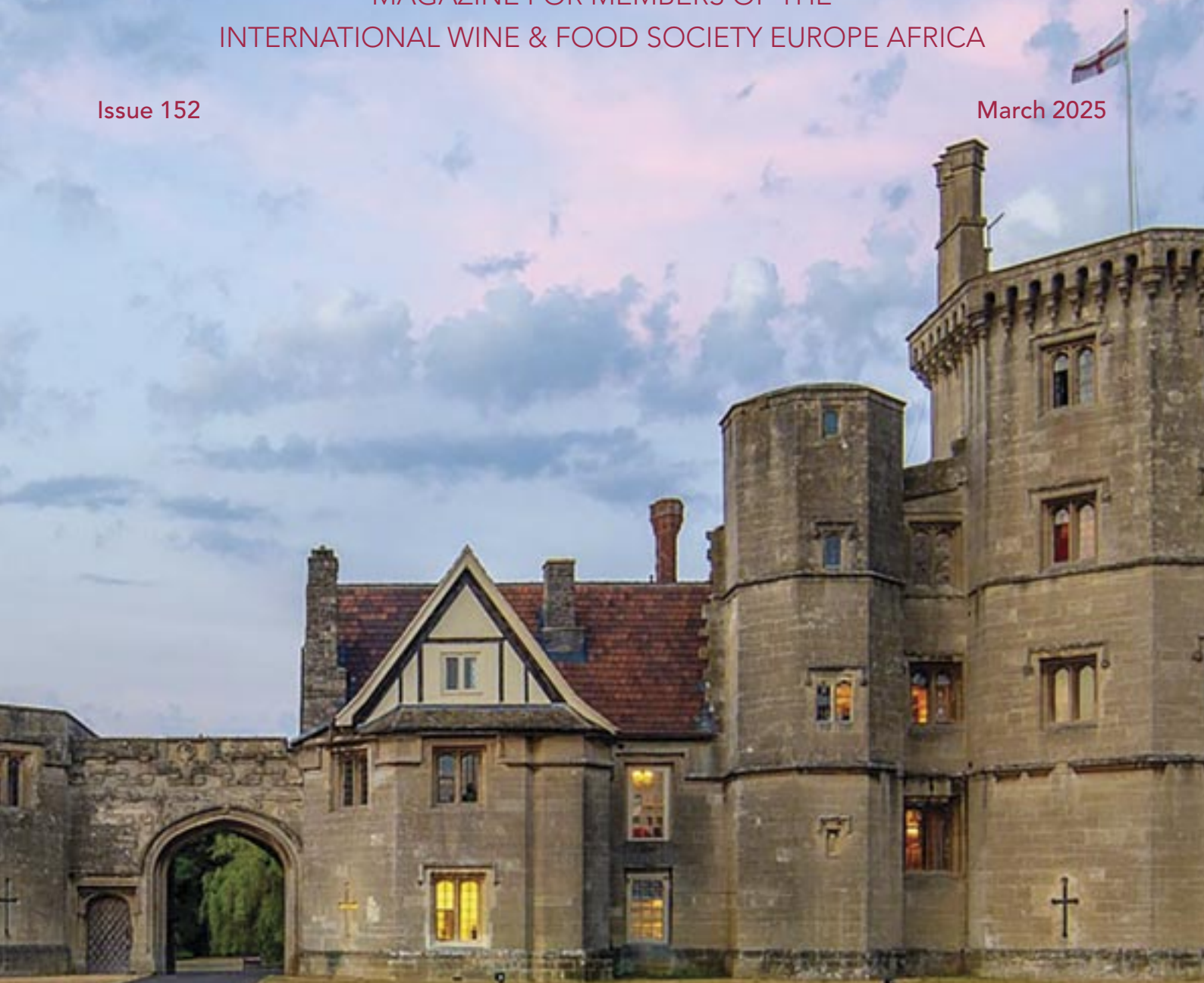


Food & Wine

MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS OF THE
INTERNATIONAL WINE & FOOD SOCIETY EUROPE AFRICA

Issue 152

March 2025



**ETNA, SICILY'S RISING
STAR**

**2023 VINTAGE REPORTS:
EUROPE**

BRANCH REPORTS

Chairman's message



We enter 2025, my final year as Chair of Exco, with several exciting developments to be unveiled during the year which include:

- In May we have a showcase Europe Africa international festival in Rioja, curated with the help of Grape Escapes and several IWFS members; this will be preceded by a two-day pre-festival based in Bilbao.
- In September, a two-night AGM weekend based near Bristol is being planned.
- There will be the launch of a front-end website with a landing page aimed at potential new members, particular those who find us through social media. It will also be useful for current members as all branches are being encouraged to publicise all their events, both those planned and reports of those that have happened. You can visit the website at www.iwfsea.org
- At last, Council has approved a substantial modernisation of the infrastructure for the Society's website. This reconstruction should enable changes to be made more easily both to the administration (in the control panel) and the website pages accessible to members and non-members.
- There will be a new monograph on sparkling wines, to be written by Essi Avallan, the first Finnish person to be awarded the prestigious Master of Wine; we are exploring whether we can record a second wine tasting video on the subject (if you haven't used the Pinot Noir video linked to the 2023 monograph for an event, I strongly recommend that you do).
- Tim Hodges and the Northern branches are well advanced in the Catering Colleges Young Chef competition. IWFS

members can attend the awards lunch in Crewe on 16th May – do support this event if you can. I hope that next year there might be some support from other parts of the UK.

- It is hoped that a new branch will emerge in Mainland Europe during the year.

These initiatives are all driven by Europe Africa or The Society for the benefit of the membership as a whole. Some are to give us the tools to increase awareness of the IWFS brand and the benefits of IWFS membership, others are to increase and make more accessible the extensive 'asset-base' that we have, for example the vintage card (including the input from our wine consultants), the pairings app, highly rated monographs, André Simon lectures (some on video), specialist articles in F&W and videos to support tasting events. These 'assets' can also help to attract new members – the appetite to learn about wine (and food) is widespread. These resources and members' enthusiasm for wine and food should enable us to entice new members to join. However, the bedrock of our Society is our branches and the events that they organise for their members – I thank all branch members who work for their branches and express a hope that others will get involved in generating enjoyable and educational events for their fellow members. Volunteer to help someone organising an event, learn from that and then perhaps set one up yourself! As it is said in a well-known advertising campaign, 'simples'. It is these events which might entice friends, colleagues or family members to 'try us out'. I encourage you to invite these 'buddies' to try one of our IWFS branch events.

Have a great year with imaginative and exciting events as well as preparing copy for Food & Wine, send input for publication on the Europe Africa Instagram account – the more, the better.

John Nicholas
Chair, IWFS Europe Africa

Cover photo: Thornbury Castle

The Society was formed on 20th October 1933 in London by wine writer André L Simon and bibliophile A J Symons. Within a month there were 230 members. Today there are over 6,000 in 131 branches worldwide.

The Society, which is an independent non-profit making organisation run by volunteers, is divided into three areas – the Europe Africa Zone, the Asia Pacific Zone, and the Americas.

In André's words,
"The purpose of the Society is to bring together and serve all who believe that a right understanding of good food and wine is an essential part of personal contentment and health and that an intelligent

approach to the pleasures and problems of the table offers far greater rewards than mere satisfaction of appetites."



In the over indulgent society of the 21st century we endeavour to examine some of the excesses of the western diet and to persuade consumers of the need for quality rather than quantity in the food and drink they consume. To this end we support suppliers of quality produce worldwide.

New members are always welcome, please see page 3 for details. Please also visit our website www.iwfs.org or for information about the Society in brief visit our Wikipedia page http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Wine_and_Food_Society



Editorial

2025 will be a memorable year for our members – a year to retail to your grandchildren, who may humour you but the message will endure. The worldwide programme includes festivals in the Americas and Asia-Pacific along with the EA series of interactive on-line seminars which are under development for presentation at branch events. In Europe Africa the highlights of the year will include the Young Chef competition in the summer and the EA Great Weekend in September in Bristol which will include the Annual General Meeting.

At the EA Great Weekend we hope to welcome members from The Americas and Asia-Pacific who are travelling in Europe. The weekend will commence on Friday 12th September with dinner in the Tudor Room at Thornbury Castle, a four-star Relais et Châteaux Hotel in Gloucestershire where guests will indulge their senses in a manner that befits the storied surroundings of the mediaeval Tudor castle. The 3AA rosette restaurant channels the same artful British-inspired cuisine that has satiated the desires of everyone from King Henry VIII to Laurence Olivier over the centuries. You will find the full history at: www.thornburycastle.co.uk



The following day Saturday 13th September, after a brief AGM and buffet lunch, plans are in hand to taste local artisan foods and English wines.

On the Saturday evening we will be inviting the chef of the AGM venue hotel to create dinner for us – above and beyond the regular menu – an opportunity to showcase the skills and imagination of the Brigade which is not always possible on the “day to day” menu.

Sunday promises a Great British breakfast experience – with a ‘Sparkling Wine’ entrée to your morning repast departing – perhaps taking the opportunity to visit a local attraction on the onward journey.

Please join us, reserve the dates 12th to 14th September 2025.

Peter McGahey
Editor

Food & Wine

Food & Wine magazine
is designed and published by
IWFS Europe Africa Ltd

Editorial email:
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Printed by
All Things Print (UK) Ltd
Upp Hall Farm, Salmons Lane
2 Lower Yard, Coggeshall
Essex CO6 1RY
www.allthingsprint.co.uk

Design and DTP by
Jayne Clementson

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DATA PROTECTION REMINDER

Always use BCC (Blind Copy) when contacting your members to avoid broadcasting their email addresses widely.

Contributors

URGENT: IWFS EUROPE AFRICA LIMITED TREASURER

Our Treasurer, Jon Doneley, has found that he has been unable to balance the time needed for IWFS to carry out the necessary duties as Treasurer with his job in a high-profile City institution: he has agreed to complete the 2024 accounts.

We need to replace him as a matter of urgency. Both Steve Graham and I have fulfilled the role and would be able to support you in the initial stages.

The main elements of the role are monitoring income and expenditure and making payments, producing a quarterly management accounts summary and forecast, using data from the Xero accounting system (with support from a professional bookkeeper), and preparing the Annual Report.

It would be ideal if a member would volunteer to take on this role. If you feel anxious about fulfilling all aspects of the role, it would be helpful if you would consider taking on part of the role, the details of which we could discuss.

I am reluctant to 'employ' external accountants as they would cost and would not find it easy to comment on results or forecasts.

To discuss or find out more, please contact me by email at johnsnicholas@aol.com or by mobile +44 7485 564 208.

John Nicholas

Chair, IWFS Europe Africa

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Etna, Sicily's Rising Star

Richard Baudains was born and bred in Jersey in the Channel Islands and trained to be a teacher of English as a foreign language. After several years in various foreign climes, Baudains settled down in beautiful Friuli-Venezia Giulia, having had the good fortune to reside previously in the winemaking regions of Piemonte, Tuscany, Liguria and Trentino-Alto Adige. Baudains wrote his first article for Decanter in 1989 and has been a regular contributor on Italian wines ever since. His day job as director of a language school conveniently leaves time for a range of wine-related activities including writing for the Slow wine guide, leading tastings and lecturing in wine journalism at L'Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche and for the web-based Wine Scholars' Guild.



PUBLICATION DATES

- **Food & Wine Online (e-newsletter) Issue 25**
December issue, deadline for copy from contributor 31st March 2025. Copy for the online e-newsletter to sec@iwfs.org

- **Food & Wine (printed) Issue 153**
July issue, deadline for copy from contributors 31st May 2025. Copy for printed magazine to editor.eaz@iwfs.org

Please send your photographs separately from the text file.

Advance notice of your events at which members of other branches would be welcome can also be included, along with booking details.

News from the International Secretariat

Dear Members

This is a bumper edition from the International Secretariat. Now is the time of year when we are able to bring you the first tranche of vintage reports to accompany the updated Vintage Card and App for 2025. Your Card will arrive as you renew your membership so it may already be with you. If not, you can of course access all the information today by downloading the App on your phone or tablet. The vintage reports below cover the 2023 vintage for all the European countries and regions featured in the Guide. When reading through the reports the words 'rigour', 'vigilance', 'patience' and 'care' are repeated across the continent. What a challenge 2023 has been, once again. The reports have once again been kindly provided freely by our treasured wine consultants and we are very grateful.

Before we head into the vintage reports here is some more news from the London office.



2025 Branch Directory

Please note that the updated 2025 version is now available online via the IWFS website.

There are 131 contacts for IWFS branches worldwide in 26 countries. This is an invaluable resource for you if you are planning to travel. To view go to www.iwfs.org (see Resource Directory and Branch Contacts/Global) or your member App (although you do have to be signed in to view this information as it is strictly for members only).

2025 Monograph – We are sticking with the traditional method...

This year's focus is on quality sparkling wine and only those made using the traditional method. There are now a number of delicious, top quality sparkling wines being produced from many different countries.

This monograph will set out to feature and guide you to those that you should certainly try. You are in good hands as this is being written by one of the best in this field – Essi Avellan MW (pictured right). Essi is Finland's first Master of Wine and is a renowned champagne and sparkling wine specialist. She is the author of several wine book and has revised an extended the 3rd and 4th



edition of Tom Stevenson's award-winning Christies' World Encyclopedia of Champagne and Sparkling Wine. In the words of Tom Stevenson "Essi is the best and most consistent taster I have encountered, and I have tasted thousands of Champagnes with her, so that is no throwaway statement." We are very excited about our 2025 project and hope you are too.

'Time for Tea' tasting video

Tea is still a 'hot' topic, or maybe not so hot if talking about sparkling tea which is best served chilled! Sparkling tea is proving very popular and is now being listed by a number of the



serious vintners such as Berry Bros and Rudd who added it to their portfolio in 2024. Bearing this in mind please remember our 'Time for Tea' tasting video for a 2025 event. The video is now available on the website, and features Will Battle who takes you through a tasting of six quality teas. There is also a checklist of what is needed to run a successful, educational event. Please take a look and we hope you take the plunge into the world of tea. Please send pictures if you do.

'English Afternoon Tea' available to buy

If you enjoyed the English Afternoon Tea sent to all members last year you might be pleased to know it is now available to purchase, via the website. As a reminder it is a classic blend of the fine Assam and Darjeeling teas which replicates the gold standard prepared for London hotels and also used for the garden party season. I am aware that a number of you run garden parties in the summer so this would be the perfect accompaniment.



As a guide each pouch provides eight servings allowing 3g per person. Cost per 25g pouch, including postage, two pouches £5 or 10 pouches £20. Click on Members Home Page/Members Merchandise to make your purchase.

GuildSomm discount

Looking for a one-stop resource for accurate, comprehensive beverage-related content? If yes, then you may wish to take a look at the GuildSomm offering. IWFS members can join for \$100 per year – a discount of \$20 off the regular annual membership of \$120.



I was impressed at the wide range of information that the paid membership unlocks – from podcasts to producer profiles.

You can find out more on this video where Jenny Hemmer, Executive Director of GSI, has recorded a special introduction for IWFS members <https://vimeo.com/1033151569>. To sign up go to this link and enter the discount code IWFS20 at checkout – <https://guildsomm.recurly.com/subscribe/individual-annual-membership>

New merchandise for 2025 – IWFS Apron

We are in the process of ordering IWFS branded aprons, similar to the one worn by Will Battle in our Time for Tea tasting video (as mentioned above). Watch this space for more details but we think they will make a nice gift to pass onto restaurant staff, maybe use for your branch events or even buy one for yourself to don when prepping in the kitchen. We think they will be a smart way to further spread the word about the IWFS.

Now, back to the Vintage Reports which are below for you to read and digest at your leisure.

Until next time...

Andrea Warren



2023 VINTAGE REPORTS: EUROPE

BORDEAUX 2023

Charles Taylor MW

www.montrachetwine.com

A seriously fine vintage in the higher echelons, a modern classic.

2023 is a heterogeneous vintage with marked variations in the quality, style and quantity produced but with the finest wines combining fully ripe fruit with excellent acidity, a profile that can be summed up as a modern classic.

It was a challenging year for growers with a wet but warm spring posing difficulties with mildew, a successful flowering giving potentially a large crop and hard decisions to be taken on when to pick. Overall, however, producers with the wherewithal to manage their vineyards effectively, the luck to avoid the heaviest rain and the nerve to choose the best moment to harvest were able to take full advantage of one of the warmest growing seasons on record, a summer with adequate but not excessive rainfall and a long period of fine autumnal weather in which to harvest.

The growing season started early with budbreak in March and was followed by a wet spring with above average temperatures. Mildew was the obvious danger and regular treatments were required throughout April and May. A drier fortnight coincided with the flowering period in the second half of May allowing an excellent fruit set and the promise of a generous crop. However, the rain returned and was accompanied by one of the hottest Junes on record. The combination of humidity and heat increased the danger of fungal disease and mildew in particular

and some vineyards lost a significant part of the crop.

July was both cooler and drier than June and below the 30 year average providing welcome relief to the vines. August was a little hotter but still fresher than most recent summers with cool nights allowing the grapes to retain highly desirable acidity. The warm weather returned with two heatwaves in the second half of August and the beginning of September. With enough rain to refresh the grapes, ripening continued apace and much of the white grapes were picked at the end of August with the merlot following in the first half of September. The fine weather continued apart from a day's rain on 21st September which varied from the torrential to minimal depending on the location. Generally the northern Médoc had the least rainfall and the cabernet sauvignon harvest was able to continue uninterrupted for a further two weeks.

The same rain kick started the sweet white wine harvest with rapid development of the highly desirable pourriture noble. Most châteaux only needed three tries to gather in the fruit which had a perfect balance of sugar and acidity.

To summarise, there are excellent wines from the top châteaux in all the major regions of Bordeaux. The northern half of the Médoc where the rainfall was lowest has the highest proportion of successes with the majority of classed growths making successful wines. These, along with the top estates that lie on well-drained limestone or gravel soils are the finest red wines of the vintage. They have an abundance of fresh, ripe fruit, fine tannins and good acidity. Whilst few wines have the extra size and dimension of the magnificent 2022s, the vast majority are



richer and riper than the 2017 and 2021 vintages and there are many estates that have made wines that bear comparison with the excellent 2019s and 2020s.

The dry whites are generally very successful. Harvested early following the relative cool July and August they are ripe but fresh with higher acidity and finer minerality than the plumper 2022s.

Similarly, the 2023 sweet white wines are truly fine; crisper and with greater vitality than the preceding vintage, the combination of a cool summer and humidity following rain on 21st September providing perfect conditions for the development of *pourriture noble*.

Prices of many wines are set to fall as a result of often generous yields and the difficult economic context and I am confident that there will be many wines that will be well worth buying.

- **Graves (Red)**
5 not ready yet
- **Haut-Medoc**
5 not ready yet
- **Pomerol & St Emilion**
5 not ready yet
- **Graves (White)**
7 not ready yet
- **Sauternes**
7 not ready yet

BURGUNDY 2023

Charles Taylor MW

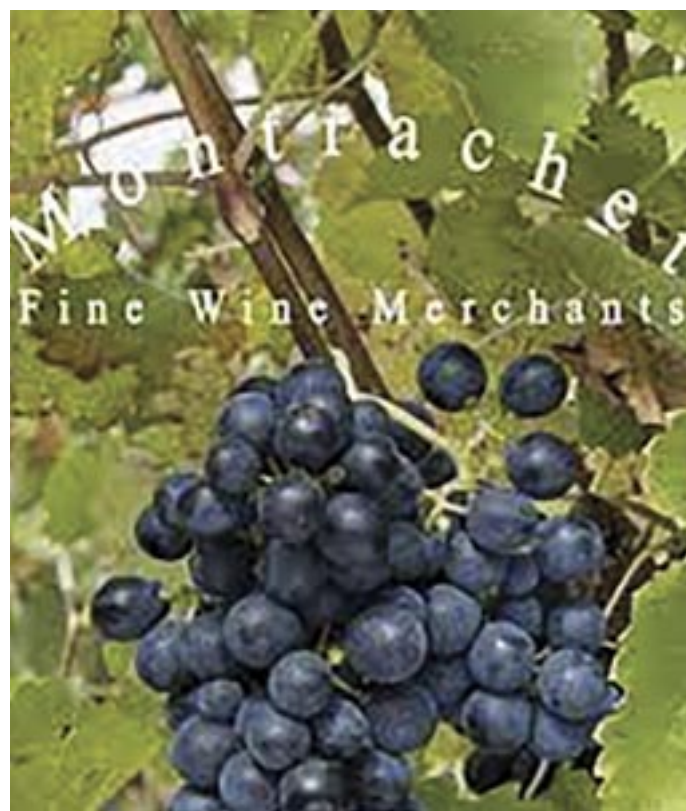
www.montrachetwine.com

Fresh, opulent whites and attractive, generous reds.

The viticultural year, for once, happily started with an early budburst and no significant frost in April. It was an unremarkable spring with normal temperatures and regular rainfall. The vineyards were healthy and the potential crop looked generous with two or three large embryonic flower clusters on each cane, the result of the consistently fine weather the previous summer.

The weather improved for the flowering at the end of May after which it was apparent that a huge crop was in prospect. As June continued with more of the same dull, cool and rainy weather, the growers were worried both by the threat of fungal diseases, particularly mildew, and by how such a large crop was going to reach full maturity. Most serious producers decided to perform at least one and sometimes two, green harvests to thin out the crop and, fortunately, the weather subsequently improved with drier and warmer conditions in July and August. Indeed, younger vines in well-drained soil even began to show signs of stress by the end of August.

Finally, a burst of hot weather with temperatures well above 30°C arrived at the beginning of September and growers suddenly found themselves bringing forward the harvest date as the grapes raced towards final ripeness at an unprecedented pace. Hot conditions necessitated the need for well-equipped cellars with cooling equipment to bring down the temperature



of the fruit and juice, and most of the white grapes were harvested with excellent levels of ripeness by the weekend of the 10th September. By then, the red wine harvest was also underway but it was complicated by a couple of days of significant rainfall on 12th and 13th September. Fortunately, the ground was dry and, after 48 hours, the later pickers were able to resume and were rewarded with greater levels of phenolic maturity.

To summarise, the whites are ripe and opulent, similar in style to the successful 2022s, with a little more acidity when grapes were picked early and with similar levels of concentration where yields had been kept under control. The reds are fresh and elegant, with beautiful, pure red fruits and sufficient structure to age gracefully.

Overall, they are more forward and less concentrated than the 2022s but will give more immediate pleasure. It is the most charming vintage since 2017, which is now beginning to drink really well, but with greater depth, personality and ageing potential. I feel that it is a vintage well worth buying since prices have, in most cases, dropped, albeit modestly, and, more importantly, the 2024 Burgundy harvest has been one of the smallest on record. This is particularly the case for the red wines where many estates have produced less than 50% of what they made in 2023.

- **Cote de Beaune (Red)**
5 not ready yet
- **Cote de Nuits (Red)**
5 not ready yet
- **Chablis**
5 not ready yet
- **Cote d'Or (White)**
6 not ready yet

**BEAUJOLAIS****Will Heslop**www.flintwines.com

2023 is among the very best vintages of the past decade for Cru Beaujolais. Heavy rain in the spring and early summer replenished water reserves (after a notably hot, dry year in 2022) without disturbing flowering. Summer saw multiple heat spikes but no sustained heatwave.

Picking at most estates in the Crus began around September 7th – up to a fortnight later than in 2022. High temperatures meant there was a risk of berries shrivelling on the vine, so harvest was completed as quickly as possible, but the majority of growers were thrilled with both the quality and quantity of the crop.

The resulting wines are juicy, fresh and detailed – with higher acidity than 2020 or 2022, and extra ripeness compared to 2021. They will be expressive and approachable in their youth, but have ample concentration for medium-term cellaring.

- Beaujolais
5 not ready yet

ALSACE 2023**David Ling**<https://confrerie-st-etienne.alsace/>

Initial tastings from all over Alsace are more than reassuring, discrediting pundits who forecast the usual effects of a 'hot vintage' like 2003 or 2020. In effect, in many French wine regions 2023 was a difficult vintage, with periods of drought, heavy rain and searing heat, but thankfully in Alsace the worst extremes were avoided.



The winter was again unusually mild, with no excess of ice or snow, and the vines developed under normal conditions. Summer was hot and dry, but some welcome showers of rain at just the right time enabled the bunches to ripen normally and ensured an average-sized crop. Some heavy rain in August led to fears of oidium and mildew where bunches had not been thinned in anticipation, so where such a green harvest had not been done, sorting tables were in evidence at harvest time to remove affected bunches or those with insects cozily installed in the tightly packed bunches.

Controversially, the authorities declared the harvest open two weeks earlier than usual to placate growers who feared more rain, but those who held their nerve and picked later took full advantage of the 'Indian Summer', gloriously sunny days and cool nights, to pick perfectly ripe grapes under ideal conditions. Botrytis ('noble rot') was rare and so not many late harvest wines were produced.

A sign of the times, two problems mentioned by growers were having to start early in the morning to protect pickers from the heat, and the difficulty of even finding harvest workers to employ!

To summarise the 2023 Alsace vintage, the wines are ripe and nicely balanced with a gentle acidity. Particular stars are : Riesling, fine elegant wines but yields were below average, Gewurztraminer, seductively aromatic with welcome freshness, and Pinot Noir, rich, ripe and deep in colour, some from bunches so healthy that selection was often made on the vine itself. Quite a treat in store...

- Alsace
6 not ready yet

CAHORS/MADIRAN 2023 (Sud-Ouest)**Britt and Per Karlsson**<https://www.bkwine.com/>

The vintage 2023 in the South West, particularly in Cahors, was marked by humid spring conditions and a very hot and dry summer. Both these things had consequences for the harvest.

The fight against downy mildew began early in the growing season. The spring was very wet, and these conditions continued well into June, with heavy storms and 200 mm of rain on June 21st. In July, the weather turned warm. Even with great effort, it was challenging to manage the fungus. Around 50% of the vineyards were affected in 2023.



The rest of the summer and September were very hot and dry. The combination of drought and fungus diseases makes 2023 a vintage where the quantity will depend on the location of the vineyards. Some vineyards could only harvest 15-17 hectolitres per hectare, whereas others managed a normal harvest of 40 hl/ha. The late August heat wave meant a fast evolution of the maturity of the grapes, and harvest started rather rapidly in September as grape bunches in some vineyards started to dry out. The result is a vintage with lower volumes. Quality wise, there is much finesse in the wines and although the skill of the producer will play a part, overall, we are looking at a promising year.



- Cahors/Madiran
5 not ready yet

CHAMPAGNE 2023**James Simpson MW**www.polroger.co.uk

Characterised by volume if not quality, the 2023 vintage will go down for many as a year of selection. Notable for an unevenness, especially when compared to near-perfect production of the three varieties in 2022, the first week of the 2023 harvest was marked by a heatwave, interspersed with



periods of rainfall, leading to a near-disastrous rise in humidity. The Meunier was worst affected, the Pinot Noir generally fared better, and the Chardonnay emerged as the most successful of the three.

The high yields came from a spring with little to no frost damage. Flowering levels then broke records, so it

was not surprising that the harvest was a bountiful one. Conditions suggested an ample crop from the outset, but Champagne's capricious weather resulted in a significant presence of downy and powdery mildew, botrytis even in some vineyards.

From the Grandes Marques to the small growers, the vineyard teams' reactivity was crucial for the treatment of a mildew epidemic that gradually gained a foothold in the region. Vineyard and grape selection was likewise important, but the test of the Champagnes will come in the tasting.

Rigorous selection in the vineyards and with the vins clairs will enable Champagne producers to compose assemblages consistent with the level of quality demanded by the region and its proponents. In the right hands and in the right places, 2023 offers plenty to look forward to.

- Champagne
5 not yet released

LANGUEDOC (Red) 2023
Matthew Stubbs MW
<https://www.vinecole.com/>

There was a marked east/west split in the Languedoc with some areas like Pic Saint-Loup seeing high spring rainfall whereas from Pézenas towards Limoux it was more a story of drought. Those areas that received these early rains were able to withstand the high late summer temperatures, despite an increased pressure from downy mildew. One of the driest areas La Clape did receive some rainfall in July which was some respite from the extremely dry winter and spring. Other appellations in the Languedoc from Picpoul de Pinet to Minervois and Corbières remained dry throughout the whole growing season. The Roussillon too was marked by drought



with little rainfall in winter and throughout the season, some areas receiving about 50% of what they would normally expect.

However it was the heatwave at the end of August for which this vintage will be remembered. Temperatures reached over 43°C for four consecutive days from 20th August causing the vines to shut down. Leaves shrivelled,

berries were small and those vines without protection from foliage risked sunburn. The net result is this is one of the lowest yielding vintages in recent years, only 400,000 hl compared to 569,000 hl in 2022.

Quality is also more variable than 2022 but despite these challenges some very good wines were made. It required, though, more vigilance in the vineyard and patience in the cellar as grape skins were thicker, sugars in the must were generally high and juice levels lower.

- Languedoc (Red)
5 not ready yet

LOIRE 2023
Jim Budd
<https://jimsloire.blogspot.com/>

Complicated! 2023 was certainly a complicated and stressful vintage for producers in a number of parts of the Loire, especially in Anjou. However, conditions were very variable – for instance the Central Vineyards suffered from drought over the summer whereas the western Loire had a huge amount of



rainfall. Parts of Anjou had over 200 mm of rain between the beginning of July and the end of September. Even locally conditions varied considerably.

Fortunately there was no serious frost this year. Bud break brought a large volume of potential grapes. This was confirmed by a rapid flowering in dry and sunny conditions at the end of May and the first part of June. Later on in June a strong pressure of mildew started, so it was essential to spray regularly and at exactly the right moment.

In addition, to some grey rot, acid rot was widespread from Vouvray westwards with Chenin particularly badly affected. It may well have been spread by *Drosophila suzukii*. Dealing with acid rot is particularly tricky for mechanical picking as superficially a bunch can appear healthy as the grapes affected may well be hidden right in the centre. Often those picking by hand were having to cut a bunch in half and then pick out the rotten grapes – a lot of additional work! 2023 is a year when the seriously rigorous vigneron/ne shines.

Despite the difficulties good wines were made. The Central Vineyards had beneficial rain just before picking started, although the large volume of grapes made the harvest 'manic'. The increasingly interesting Upper Loire had a good vintage as did much of eastern Touraine, except for the Chenin affected by acid rot. Reds from Saumur and Western Touraine in parts where rot was less of a problem are also promising.

The Pays Nantais was also successful with picking starting at the beginning of September. It is likely that little sweet wine was made, especially in the more prestigious appellations. Already many producers in Anjou are increasingly concentrating on dry Chenin. A number of producers decided early in the harvest not to attempt to make sweet wine in 2023.

2023 was one of the most complicated vintages of recent times. I have little doubt that some awful wines were made, so it is crucial to buy from producers you trust.

- **Loire (Red)**
5 not ready yet
- **Loire (Sweet)**
not readily available
- **Loire (Dry White)**
4 not ready yet (member app only)

PROVENCE 2023

Rod Smith MW

<https://rivierawineacademy.com/biography.php>

The early part of 2023 saw a continuation of 2022's drought, with water restrictions imposed as early as March. However, at the beginning of May a deluge came and persisted until well into June. It did bring much needed water, but also caused landslides and run-off in Provence (as in much of North Italy). It



also brought the onset of mildew (both powdery and downy), which required careful treatment in the vineyard and subsequently in the winery.

Warm and dry conditions took over from the end of June, although there was less heat-stress than in 2022. There were further storms at harvest time,

these brought a risk of dilution and rot, especially for later black grapes for red wines. These September storms were to a degree localised though.

The 2023 vintage is therefore somewhat 'curate's egg', hence the rating. Top quality producers of reds in Bandol and elsewhere have made good wines via rigorous selection. Lesser reds should be treated with more caution. The rosés and whites resemble those of 2022, with a mixture of early harvesting for acidity and later for flavour being the path to success.

- **Provence**
4 not ready yet

RHÔNE VALLEY 2023

John Livingstone Learmonth

www.drinkrhone.com

Northern Rhône 2023 is a complicated vintage for the Northern Rhône. The region experienced drought, some mildew, ripening hold-ups, then very different surges of rainfall in mid September, which will play a prominent role in separating quality across different domaines and sectors.

For example, on 18th September, 200 mm (8 in) fell at Hermitage and 180 mm (7.2 in) at Cornas, while Côte-Rôtie received just 25 mm (1 in). Spring and early summer rainy weather was replaced by drought, before mid-August rain



alleviated that situation, which was followed by a week of extreme heat at the end of August – these were not relaxing conditions for humans or vines. Blockages of ripening on the Syrah occurred, so growers were careful not to extract, the more so because the Syrah was becoming fragile by the second half of September.

There is an aromatic side to the wines and sufficient density to enable them to have a structure to evolve. Côte-Rôtie will be more homogenous than other appellations due to its lesser rainfall. Growers are happy with Condrieu in 2023, comparing it to 2022, and noting that there is freshness present. Mildew in the offing, then drought, then high heat was not a normal route to achieve a well balanced wine, one with lowish acidity, but the outcomes are regarded as successful, the degree around 13.5°C.

The Marsanne-Roussanne whites are appealing, supple and open, offering early pleasure.

Southern Rhône 2023 is a vintage that has experienced growers very happy with events, the vineyards aided by good levels of pre-season rain, then experiencing drought, then just about avoiding mildew later in the year, since June was cool and rather rainy. The 10 days of 40°C at the end of August were on the limit in creating jam-like grapes, while tannins still needed time to ripen, so the pathway was complicated. Yields were high, and required green harvesting for best quality. However, the late season weather was tip-top, and harvesting took place calmly. There is richness in the reds of Châteauneuf-du-Pape in a vintage that may be ahead of 2022, certainly deeper than 2021. Gigondas with its cooler zones has done well. Without the heat spike, it could have been a really classic vintage, but it rates highly within the context of recent years.

The whites and rosés are attractive, sometimes gentle, and give fluent drinking, degrees restrained.

- **Rhône Red (North)**
5 not ready yet,
- **Rhône Red (South)**
6 not ready yet,
- **Rhône White (North)**
6 possible to drink



AUSTRIA 2023

Lance Foyster MW

<https://www.clarkfoysterwines.co.uk/>

2023 vintage conditions required much hard work and patience in the vineyards throughout Austria. Weather conditions certainly kept producers on their toes, presenting them with a dry, mild Winter followed by abundant Spring rainfall and challenging episodes of damp and disease. Summer brought with it frequent hot spells and damaging hailstorms affecting most wine-producing regions, adding further to the climatic turbulence of the vintage.

Nonetheless, a glorious Autumn was to follow, with wonderful conditions in the vineyard rewarding those winemakers who demonstrated reactivity, patience, and hard labour with some outstanding wines.

Overall, Austria's whites in 2023 are bright, densely packed, and vibrant, showing great harmony between ripeness of fruit and refreshing acidity. A pronounced fruity profile and well-rounded acidity are likely characteristics of Grüner Veltliner, with well-defined grapey aromas and notes of stone fruit showing themselves in 2023, rather than the savoury notes and peppery spice that can sometimes characterise this variety.



Reds, too, are in many cases full-bodied and juicy, packed tightly with well-balanced fruit flavours and showcasing impressive structural balance and freshness. For many, 2023 will be the next outstanding red wine vintage, following on from the successes of 2019 and 2021. Sweet wine, and Eiswein in particular, was also produced in considerable volumes. With a relatively late on-set of botrytis, dessert wines are found to be of a very high quality, framed by an impressive stream of refreshing acidity.

Climatic instability in 2023 presented even the most experienced winemaker with many challenges in the vineyard. Volumes produced were generally lower than average, however the quality of those wines made is, overall, extremely high.

(additional resource for report was the Austrian Wine website <https://www.austrianwine.com/>)

- **Austria (White)**
6 not ready yet
- **Austria (Red)**
6 not ready yet
- **Austria (Sweet)**
7 not ready yet (member app only)

ENGLAND (Sparkling) 2023

Mimi Avery

www.averys.com

2023 was a tricky vintage where some producers will have done well and others not depending on their harvest schedule. 2023 had the potential to be another 2012 harvest, the most



challenging season in 30 years but the Indian Summer saved the day. In the east of England it was evident from the delivery of the first fruit that this was going to be a big harvest, analysis showed good ripening levels. It was a heavy crop with almost 50% more weight of fruit than expected. The west of the country had extremely hot weather during flowering which messed with the potassium levels. This

meant sugar and acids did not behave as expected. Subsequently this vintage will be a keeper and its strength will be when the wines have had time to mature.

- **England (Sparkling)**
4 not yet released

GERMANY 2023

Konstantin Baum MW

<https://www.konstantinbaum.com/> and

<https://baumselection.com/>

Mosel Region The 2023 vintage in the Mosel highlighted Riesling's suitability to the region's climate. The yields and qualities varied based on location and water supply. Warmer



winter temperatures led to early budding on 25th April. Predominantly dry and warm weather in May and June promoted vine growth, with flowering starting around 8th June. June and July's heat caused drought stress in drier sites and sunburn issues in July. Heavy rains at the end of July helped. Summer was followed by warm September nights, accelerating ripening unusually fast, resulting in very high degrees

Oechsle. Over 50% of grapes were harvested at a Spätlese level and there were also botrytized Riesling grapes harvested for higher Prädikatslevels.

Rheingau Region The Rheingau was also hit by heat spikes and heavy rains followed in July and August negatively impacting the grape health of Pinot Noir, necessitating careful selection to harvest healthy grapes. Riesling grapes remained healthy throughout the Rheingau, especially in steeper slopes, leading to high-quality, albeit sometimes small, yields. The total yield for Rheingau is estimated at 228,000 hectoliters, a six percent increase over the long-term average. The harvest started early and required intense selection, especially for non-Riesling grapes. Despite the early harvest completion by mid-October, the hot September days required substantial cooling technology. Early morning and night harvesting were common.

- Mosel
6 not ready yet
- Rhine
6 not ready yet

HUNGARY (Tokaji Aszu) 2023**Charles Mount**<https://royal-tokaji.com/>

After a first quarter with good rainfall and warm weather, the second quarter was characterised by balanced weather and intensive work in the vineyards. In the third quarter good conditions for ripening and good rainfall favoured the set of



botrytis on the bunches. At the end of this period we were half way through our dry harvest and had collected first generation aszú berries from our parcels. The fourth

quarter turned quite wet which affected the quality of the aszú berries but most producers were able to complete their planned harvest. The vintage shows very good quality for the dry wines which have very good balance and fruit. The aszú wines have the thrilling acidity of the first generation and ripeness from subsequent passes through the vineyards.

- Tokaj-Aszu
6 not yet released

ITALY (Red) Piedmont 2023**David Way**<https://winefriend.org/david-way/>

The 2023 vintage in the Langhe (Barolo and Barbaresco), was marked by extreme variations and multiple challenges. The vines had suffered stress in 2021 owing to the low rainfall and high temperatures, and even lower rainfall and extreme heat in 2022. In 2023 the spring was warm, but May and June saw a period of cool temperatures and near constant rain. On the one hand the rain was welcome, helping to offset to some extent the preceding drought. However, much of the rain simply ran off the vineyards. (For the future, growers may have to consider getting permission to create ponds for their own use.) On the other hand, the constant rain was a problem in itself. Growers had to be very conscientious in their spraying in order avoid substantial losses to downy mildew. Some losses were inevitable as, at times, it was too wet to get into the vineyard to spray. Producers who work organically were particularly challenged.

The Langhe mainly escaped the devastating hail that caused near total losses in parts of nearby Roero in July. Late summer saw a heat wave that blocked some ripening and burnt some bunches,



followed by welcome rain. Although 2022 was hotter overall, 2023 was marked by swings from cooler to hotter weather and by higher temperature peaks. Growers had to work regularly to remove fruit damaged fruit (due to either or both downy mildew and sunburn) at several points in the season. However, September and early October were warm and allowed Nebbiolo to ripen. In the end, conscientious producers had a small but high-quality harvest with lower alcohol levels than in recent years.

- Piedmont
6 not yet released

ITALY (Red) Tuscany and Sicily 2023**Richard Baudains**

Due to extreme weather conditions which accompanied practically the whole period of the vegetative cycle, the 2023 vintage was one of the most difficult to grow in recent years across the whole of Italy and was particularly challenging in the centre and south of the country.

Tuscany – a cold April resulting in late flowering, was followed by months of May and June with high temperatures and persistent rain which sparked often devastating attacks of downy mildew. July was very hot and August saw damaging hail in some areas. What saved the harvest were the months of September and the first half of October, which were warm and very dry, allowing a late but complete ripening of the reduced crop and promising wines which will probably be superior to 2022. Production is down an average 20% across the region, but some producers suffered even greater losses.

- Tuscany
6 not yet released

Sicily – the weather followed a similar pattern in Sicily, with the added difficulty of strong winds during the cold and wet month of April, which disturbed flowering. May and June again saw rife fungal disease due to the hot wet conditions. Record temperatures, with peaks in the high 40s in July, had negative effects, especially in the west of the island. The weather stabilized in September and continued fine through October, allowing for a much reduced crop, (on average down 30%) but overall grape quality superior to expectations. The higher vineyards on Etna, and particularly in the predominantly red wine area of the northeast fared better than the rest of the island, although quality may be uneven.

- Sicily
5 not ready yet

VALPOLICELLA (Amarone) 2023(see <https://www.tenutasantamaria.wine/harvest-report-2023/>)

- Valpolicella (Amarone)
5 not yet released



PORTUGAL 2023

Charles Metcalfe

Spring and autumn rains prevented 2023 from being a year of top quality. 'Challenging' was a word frequently used to sum up the year.

North – The Douro had good winter and early spring rains, giving vineyards ample water after the very dry 2022. The summer avoided heat-spikes, and was dry until occasional September showers, which refreshed the vines. Most of the best vineyards were picked before heavy rain in mid-September. Some outstanding wines have been made.

Good wines were made in both Dão and Bairrada, though rains in September spoiled the end of harvest.

South – In the Alentejo, production was about 5 to 10% bigger than in 2022. Quality was very good. August heatwaves and some rain before the end of harvest prevented 2023 from being a perfect year.

- **North**
6 not ready yet
- **South**
5 not ready yet

VINTAGE PORT

Richard Mayson

www.richardmayson.com

The winter in early 2023 brought welcome rain to the Douro after a year of extreme drought. A warm spring along with plentiful groundwater led to early-season vigour in the vineyards. Flowering was early but heavy rain in late spring caused mildew problems along with localised hail damage. *Veraison* was early and ripening was even without the shutdown that accompanies periods of extreme heat and drought. White grapes were picked from the start



of August, making this one of the earliest harvests on record. There was a short period of very aggressive heat in late August and by 1st September Port grapes were already being harvested. It all looked very promising until rain halted picking around the middle of the month and continued to fall on and off until the end of September. There was an Indian summer in October. Good wines were made early on with Touriga Nacional (mostly picked before the rain) performing well. Yields were relatively high but the Port *benefício* (authorisation) was reduced by more than 10 per cent due to falling sales. Expect some very good single *quinta* Ports from this vintage to be released in the spring of 2025 as well as good and plentiful red and white Douro wines.

(Richard Mayson is author of Port and the Douro published by Academie du Vin and Chairs the Port and Madeira panel for the Decanter World Wine Awards)

- **Vintage Port**
5 not yet released

SPAIN 2023

Harold Heckle

Very hot weather followed by heavy rainfall in Rioja and Ribera del Duero caused major problems for producers. Some harvested early, sacrificing perfect maturity in a bid to avoid

Botrytis and grape skin problems. It became obvious that climatic conditions had affected the harvest to an unusual degree when both Rioja and Ribera del Duero delayed their verdicts on the overall quality of the harvest by more than a month. Eventually, half way through June, both declared the vintage as *Muy Buena*, very good. Hence, I think it's safe to give a mark of 6 to 2023 in those regions. Priorat and the northeast suffered a lack of rainfall to the point where top wine producers acknowledged that they had been forced to use irrigation for the first time in the region's history. I think it is safe to say that the vintage in the northeast can also be categorised as a 6 given that there was no risk of fungus although the fruit will have struggled to retain adequate levels of acidity.



- **North East Spain**
6 not ready yet
- **Ribera del Duero**
6 not ready yet
- **Rioja**
6 not ready yet

See issue 153 for reports from the 2023/2024 vintage for the countries/regions outside Europe. Please note that these reports back to 2021 are available to download from the Secretariat/For Members/Vintage Card Information section of the website.

ETNA, SICILY'S RISING STAR

by *Richard Baudains*

Introduction

Sicily is a major force in the current Italian wine scene. It has enormous natural resources and an industry which is dynamic, outward looking and reactive. If in the 1990s it was the introduction of international varieties which first raised the profile of Sicilian wine, (there is an interesting historical parallel with Tuscany here) today it is the appeal of the island's native varieties which is driving the market, and amongst these, the wines of Etna are undoubtedly the rising stars.

Sicily overview

The first thing to say about Sicily is that it is big. With nearly 98,000 ha under vine (latest data from the Ministry of Agriculture) it has more vines than any other region in Italy. To put that figure in an international context, it has been calculated that the island has three times the vineyard area as that of the whole of New Zealand put together. With 61 authorised grape varieties, 23 DOCs one DOCG, numerous IGTs and a huge diversity of soils and climate conditions, the production is also extremely heterogeneous. The challenge for the modern wine industry, which relies heavily on export, has been to create a critical mass with a recognisable brand identity. The strategy over the past ten years has been to invest heavily in the catch-all, island-wide Sicilia DOC. The denomination is currently claimed by roughly one fifth of the total surface area and in 2022 accounted for a production of more than 83 million bottles (Sicilia DOC Consorzio). The wines have a very clear stylistic orientation. In its official promotional material, the dynamic and very efficient producers' Consorzio, declares the aim of the DOC is to offer wines which are (quote) "sustainable, modern and easy to drink", a characterisation which corresponds to the

vast majority of the wines currently on the market. Sustainable, certainly. Thanks to the low pressure of vine disease, Sicily is able to claim the highest percentage of organically managed vineyards in the country (although that has to be balanced by the energy resources needed for the indispensable use of refrigeration in the cellar). Modern and easy to drink, also. The wines are generally of a high technical standard and meet the contemporary demand for fresh wines, increasingly white rather than red, with low-to-moderate alcohol levels. Within the category, there is much to enjoy. Grillo, when not over-cropped, makes white wines with an appealing candied fruit and herby character. Cerasuolo di Vittoria is capable of dry, spicy wines with a slightly liquoricy note. Catarratto can be crisp and citrusy when made sensitively. However, the search for native grape wines with the structure and complexity to age, takes one elsewhere; for example, to the rare sweet wines from the islands, to the great solera Marsalas (a subject which would require an article in its own right) and to the wines of the moment, Etna DOC.

Etna DOC

The Terroir

Mount Etna rises to a summit of 3,300 metres and has a circumference of 180km. Roughly two-thirds of this circumference is included in the Etna DOC zone, which stretches in an arc from the north to the southwest face of the volcano, climbing from 500 to 1,000m above sea level. Mount Etna has been described as "an island within the island", with a natural environment which is strikingly different to that of any other in the region.





Soils

The soils are nearly exclusively of direct volcanic origin and vary, according to the period of the lava flow that created them, from pebbly gravel to sand with varying amounts of ash and pomace. The concentration of minerals, in particular potassium, combined with high water retention makes them extremely fertile, while their alkaline chemical composition makes for wines with low pH, a feature which favours longevity and gives both reds and whites a notable tangy intensity. More difficult to pinpoint exactly, but something which many tasters note, is a smoky, gunflint character which tends to emerge with age.

Climate

Annual rainfall ranging from 600mm to over 1000mm, is considerably higher than that of any other viticultural area on the island. As a result of the high altitudes, diurnal temperature variations are consistently more extreme, reaching up to as much as 30°C in some parts of the mountain in the run in to the harvest. The long half-moon shape of the DOC zone makes for significant climate variation between the different slopes of the mountain, but the common features are long hours of sunlight, more or less constant ventilation and fewer temperature peaks than in any other part of the island. Put together, these features make for healthy grapes, long ripening and late harvesting.

Vineyards

Although recent plantings are often wire trained, Etna is best known for its bush vines, which may be free standing or supported by single poles. Steeper slopes are terraced, but traditionally not planted in rows but rather on the "quincone" system of equidistance between vines. Collectively, Etna probably has the oldest vineyard population of anywhere in

Italy. Eighty-year old vines are far from a rarity and, thanks to soils which offer a natural barrier against phylloxera, many older plants are still ungrafted,

Evolution

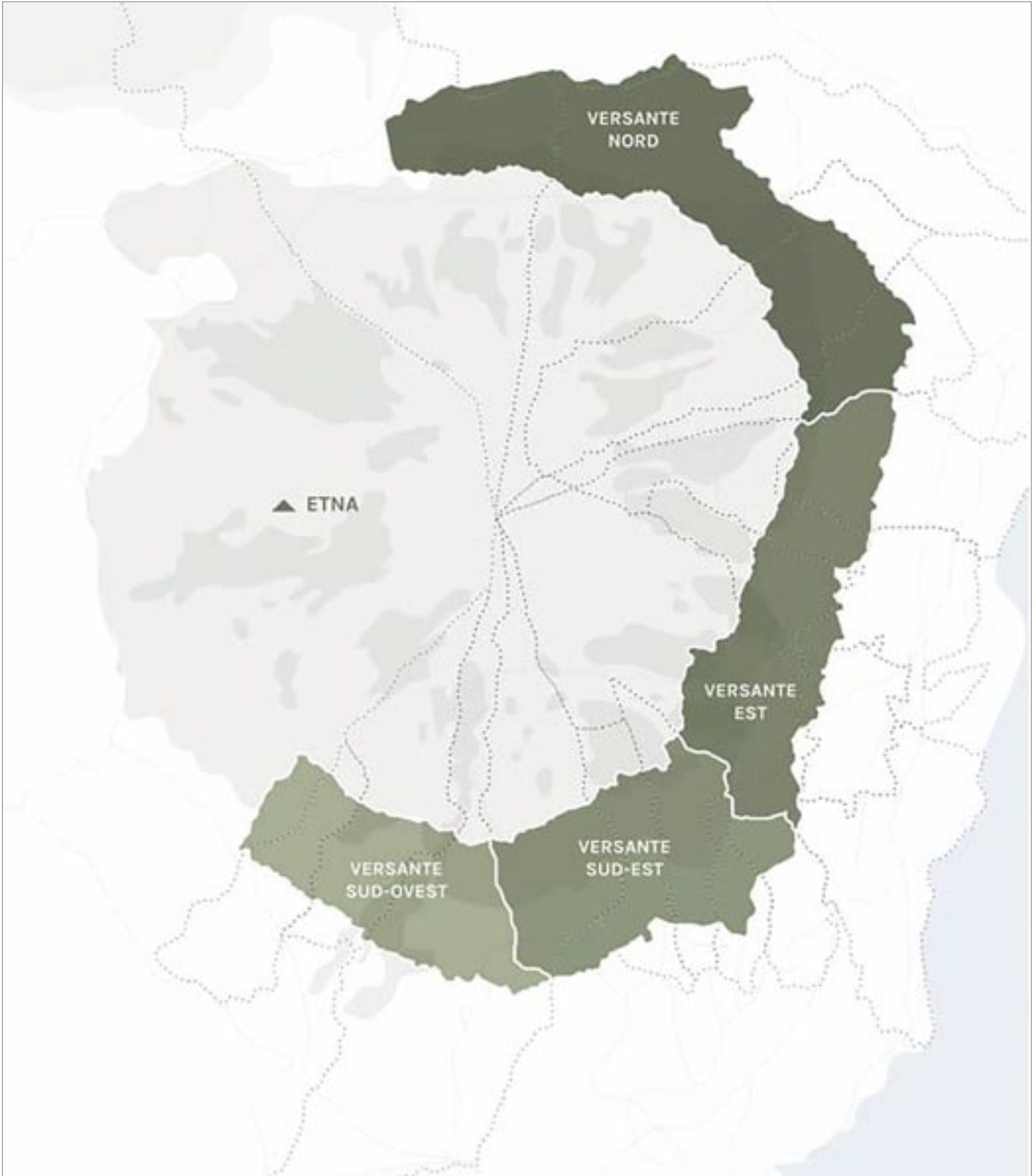
The most highly quoted producers of Etna Rosso today command prices on a level with prestige Barolo, but it has not always been so. Etna has a history of bulk wine production for blending, and not of premium bottled wine, and it is a legacy which it has carried with it until very recent times. Etna gained DOC status in 1968, but the impact of the DOC was slow to be felt. Burton Anderson summed up the status of the production at the beginning of the 1990s when he wrote in his *Wine Atlas of Italy* (Mitchel Beazley, 1990) that the wines of Etna "though produced in some quantity, never equal the grandeur of the setting". He conceded that Carricante had "good fruit and acidity" but he found that "reds from Nerello Mascalese are rarely inspiring". At that time, critics had scant regard for Sicily as a whole, and Etna was completely off the critical radar. It was not until nearly 20 years later that the wines started to receive serious attention, as the first new investors arrived from outside the region. Even then however, growth was slow. The real acceleration has only been seen in the past ten years. According to the data of the Etna Consorzio, in 2013 there were 203 growers and 680ha in production in the DOC zone. By 2021 the number of growers had risen to 390 and the area under vine to 1,300ha. In the same period, total production rose from 1.5 million bottles to 4.5 million and increased again in 2023 to over 5.8 million (Regione Siciliana Ist. del Vino e dell'Olio), still a drop in the ocean compared to the 83 million bottles of the Sicilia DOC, but an indication of the explosion of interest in Etna wines. The rapid growth has not always been accompanied by

consistent quality, but in the hands of the top producers, Etna is capable of wines of great personality, and an elegance and finesse which is often likened to that of Burgundy. An application for an up grade to DOCG status is in the pipeline, and it will be interesting to see the effect of tighter controls which should be coming into effect by 2006.

The White Grapes: Carricante

The white Carricante is a true native of Sicily, with a history of production limited exclusively to the island. It was planted more

extensively across the region in the past, but it is sensitive to drought stress and fungal diseases and it requires the very particular conditions that Etna offers to thrive. Carricante is vigorous and potentially high-yielding and it only produces quality if it is pruned short. It is a late variety, but it ripens at altitudes, in some cases outside the DOC zone at over 1,000 metres, at which the red Nerello struggles. It has low sugar, high total acidity and very low pH, qualities which in the past were prized as the base for Vermouth in the north of Italy, but with the right handling, offer the prerequisites for the production of





what is arguably Italy's greatest native white wine. When the wines are young, they can appear deceptively simple, but they have a prodigious ability to develop over time, acquiring a flinty intensity with Riesling-like nuances and great depth and complexity. The variety is generally bottled under the Etna Bianco label, possibly in blends with small percentages of the local Minella and/or Catarratto.

The Red Grapes: Nerello Mascalese

Nerello Mascalese is the principle grape of the Etna Rosso DOC. The variety takes its name from the Piana di Mascali, a coastal plain to the north of Catania. Ian d'Agata in his definitive work on the subject, *Native Wine Grapes of Italy* (University of California Press, 2014) cites studies which trace the origin of the variety to a natural crossing between Sangiovese and Mantonic Bianco, which makes it a relative of Calabria's Galioppo, and in part explains Nerello Mascalese's pale shades. There are two principle clones available commercially, but the majority of the population derives from massal selections, making for notable intravarietal diversity. Like Carricante, it is a vigorous variety which performs best with short-pruned bush training. It ripens before Carricante on warmer, lower slopes and tends to be sensitive to vintage variation and especially to terroir. The variety has moderate alcohol, moderate to high acidity and tannins which need to ripen completely to avoid giving an excessively vegetal streak to the wines. Nerello Mascalese is typically blended with Nerello Cappuccio, which on its own is a less interesting grape, but complements the former by reinforcing the colour and softening the acidity. The intense sour red fruit and dry, linear profile of a classic Etna Rosso make it highly attractive to drink young, but with moderate bottle age, the aromas broaden to include intriguing notes of tobacco leaf and Mediterranean herbs. Older bottles

are hard to come by, but in my experience the wines seem to peak at 8-10 years.

Sub-Zones: The 'Versanti'

The Etna DOC area is conventionally divided into four macro-zones. The 'Versante Nord', the north side of the mountain, stretches from Randazzo to Linguaglossa and in addition to these key sites, takes in the leading villages of Castiglione and Passopisciaro. The distinguishing features of the climate are high rainfall, warm autumns and all the year round winds. Perhaps counter intuitively, the growing conditions in the north favour Nerello Mascalese, rather than white varieties, and red wines dominate. The north face is the most densely planted of the four sub-zones and also has some of the oldest vines. Top producers include Donnafugata, Graci, Passopisciaro, Russo and Tenuta di Terre Nere. The wines are noted for their intensity and finesse.

The 'Versante Est' is an extensive area which stretches from the town of Giarre due south in the direction of Arcireale. The eastern slopes look directly towards the sea, and consequently have a climate with marked maritime influences. This is white wine country. Etna Bianco Superiore, a specific denomination created in the DOC regulations of 1968, can only be sourced from the area around the village of Milo. Benchmark producers include I Vigneri from Milo and Barone di Villagrande from the village of the same name. The wines are renowned for their structure and ageing potential.

The 'Versante Sud-Est' is a smaller area above the towns of Trecastagni and Viagrande. Slopes with predominantly sandy soils which rise from 450 up to 900metres, combined with a relatively milder climate with good rainfall create growing





conditions for both red and white varieties. Leading producers who bottle single cru selections from the area include the historic Benanti and Nicosia wineries.

The 'Versante Sud-Ovest', which extends around the villages of Biancavilla and Santa Maria di Lucodia at the southwest corner of the DOC, is the least exploited of the viticultural areas. It is a late picked environment which has the most extreme climate of the sub-zones, with the lowest rainfall (600mm/year) and the greatest temperature excursions. Slopes which rise to points above 1000 metres in theory should favour Carricante but the two producers in the area with a certain visibility, Masseria Setteporte at Biancavilla and Terra dei Lupi at Santa Maria, both specialise in red wines.

Sub-Zones: The 'Contrade'

A 'contrada' is the typical land unit of the Sicilian countryside, bigger than a single vineyard, but smaller than a comune. A contrada may have multiple owners, or in some cases be a monopole. Since the revision of the DOC in 2011, producers have the option of including a contrada name on their labels as a *Menzione Geografica Aggiunta (MGA)* in the same way as in Barolo or other DOCs with the same legislation. The original list of contrade had 133 sites, distributed across the whole of the DOC, but concentrated for the main part in the north, in the comunes of Randazzo, Castiglione and Passopisciaro. In the latest, highly detailed map produced by the Etna Consorzio, the number of sites has grown to 142. Familiarity with the characters of the individual contrade is probably beyond the competence of all but the most expert cartographers, but the differences between the cru selections of a single producer are striking examples of terroir in action.

Quo Vadis?

Following a decade of dizzy ascent, Etna is now in the situation of having to manage success. Rapid growth has led inevitably to an increase in the number of entry level wines from the denomination, and some producers are anxious that Etna is in danger of losing the focus on terroir-driven, fine wine in favour of simpler, immediate-drinking varieties that slot into the general profile of the DOC Sicilia. Given the potential for further growth and the strong market demand, I think there may be the risk of the Icarus effect, but the application for DOCG and the mapping of the contrade are indications that the policy of the Etna Consorzio is to support top end production. Although some international varieties are grown with success on the mountain, I do not see them playing an important future role in this. Perhaps the biggest challenge which lies ahead is the great unknown of climate change, but Etna producers have the inestimable advantage of being able to combat rising temperatures by moving further up the mountain. There are already vineyards at 1,300m, and it is not inconceivable that the DOC zone will have to be extended in the future beyond the current 1,000m limit.

Selected Producers

The following is a selection, in alphabetical order, of wineries with an established track record for the production of wines which express the unique character of the Etna DOC.

- **Barone di Villagrande (Milo)**
Estate founded in 1727, now in the 10th generation of family

ownership, the Barone di Villagrande are benchmark producers of Etna Bianco Superiore.

- **Benanti (Viagrande)**
Long established quality producer, Benanti own vineyards in all four "versanti". Celebrated for their Bianco Superiore Pietramarina and the Rosso Riserva Rivittello.
- **Calcagno (Passopisciaro)**
Family owned, artisan winery with 6ha of old vines, including a parcel in the renowned Feudo di Mezzo contrada.
- **Frank Cornelissen (Passopisciaro)**
One of the first foreign owners, Belgian wine lover Cornelissen arrived on Etna in 2001. Minimal intervention in the cellar and wines with great natural spontaneity.
- **Donnafugata (Randazzo)**
The Marsala-based Donnafugata are one of a number of leading Sicilian producers to move to Etna in recent years. Red and whites from small selected parcels in key contrade.
- **Graci (Passopisciaro)**
Alberto Graci abandoned a career in finance to return to his native Sicily in 2004, to found the innovative winery which produces a highly acclaimed range of reds and whites
- **I Custodi delle Vigne (Castiglione)**
The winery founded in 2007 by Roman businessman Mario Pauluzi, with the consultancy of Salvo Foti, produces a diversified, high quality range from 13ha of old vines.
- **I Vigneri (Milo)**
Agronomist, winemaker and educator, catalyst of the Etna revival, from his own estate Salvo Foti produces white wines which are a pure expression of their terroir.
- **Passopisciaro (Passopisciaro)**
The late Andrea Franchetti was one of the pioneers of the new wave on Etna. His son continues the production of Nerello-based red wines of great personality.
- **Russo (Passopisciaro)**
Giuseppe Russo inherited the 18ha estate with, amongst other sites, old vines in the top contrade of San Lorenzo and Calderara Sottana from which he makes renowned Etna Rosso.
- **Tenuta delle Terre Nere (Randazzo)**
Marc de Grazia applied the vast experience acquired as a specialist wine exporter to the creation of a model estate which produces single contrada selections of great refinement.
- **Cantine Nicosia (Trecastagni)**
Historic estate owners in the southeast of the DOC, the Nicosia family are testimony to the transition of the Etna wine industry from bulk production to super-premium bottled wines.

Images © Etna DOC Consorzio

ANDRÉ SIMON GOLD AWARD



Presented on 2nd December 2024 to Ron Barker at the Blackpool & Fylde Coast Branch Annual Dinner at Fairhaven Golf Club in Lytham

Some of you may be wondering why I am here today. You may also not be aware that The Society's Awards Committee/Council are the only body that can award an André Simon Silver or Gold medallion.

It is my pleasure and honour to be here to present to one of your members a Gold award, which was approved by Council on 15th November in Hong Kong.

Ron Barker, of course. Ron, you have served the Society in many capacities since early 2000, starting with roles as a branch committee member, branch secretary, branch events coordinator, and finally as branch chairman, and you continue to serve your branch.

After being seen as a successful branch leader, you were invited to join the Europe Africa Committee (EAC), which we now call Exco, becoming editor of Food & Wine in 2007. You transformed the regular newsletter into the glossy Food & Wine Magazine that we have today both in hard copy for Europe Africa members and online for our world-wide membership. You moved on to become EAC Awards Officer before being elected Chair of EAC in 2009. You also joined Council in 2009 remaining a member until 2016, attending several face-to-face meetings around the world. As well as attending many festivals you were instrumental in helping to organise the Merseyside, Edinburgh and London Society Festivals, particularly helping to organise

the menus, wine choices and its supply. You are still contributing as one of the team of members from Northern based branches helping to launch the IWFS Young Chef of the year competition for Catering Colleges, which now involves 10 colleges and is in its fourth year.

Through your contacts in the wine trade, your recognised wine judging and active contact with several Masters of Wine you were asked to take on the role of Chair of the IWFS Wines Committee in 2016 and have coordinated the production and updating of the annual vintage card for the past eight years, a benefit to all members worldwide and recognised outside the Society as an easy reference to the quality of different vintages of wine. More recently, with the Society administrator, Andrea Warren, you have encouraged the panel of wine consultants to produce written reports for publication in various Society journals.

I have summarised your roles in the Society, but as much as anything it has been your dedication to the Society and its values – good wine, good food in the company of friends with a common interest. In all these tasks, you have epitomised the spirit of the Society, managed on behalf of its members, by the voluntary efforts of its members, and demonstrated your leadership in 'getting things done'. This really is a small token in recognition of all your efforts though it is the ultimate award for your contribution to the Society. Of course, you would not have been able to contribute so much to our Society without the support of your wife, Val. So to both of you – thank you.

Finally, Ron, it is a great honour for me to present this prestigious André Simon Gold Medallion award to you on behalf of the Society with thanks for everything you have done for the Society and its membership over the last quarter of a century.

John Nicholas

IWFS AWARDS

It's great to see one of our new Restaurant Excellence Awards being presented by Devonshire to Rodean (see page 22). Why not take the opportunity to offer an award to your own branch's favourite restaurant?

Here's a reminder of the Restaurant Awards we offer:

- **Branch Excellence Award**
A thank you for good food, wine and service
Decided by the branch and approved by 50% of the branch membership
- **EAZ Excellence Award**
An award for exceptional food wine and service
Endorsed by 50% of member attendees at an event

Here's a reminder of the Personal Awards we offer too:

- **10 years** dedicated service to branch
- **25 years** active service supporting events/activities
- **EAZ Exceptional Service Diploma** (no time scale)
- **André Simon Bronze Award** for meritorious service at local, national or international level

- **André Simon Silver Award** for distinguished service at international level
- **André Simon Gold Award** for exceptional service at international level
- Other Awards for those who have served the society well over several years, e.g. wine merchants, hoteliers

Reasons to offer awards:

- To encourage excellence and motivate chefs to the boundaries of culinary creativity
- To celebrate the dedication and hard work of the chefs and their teams
- To guide others in their quest for extraordinary dining experiences
- To boost visibility and reputation – the restaurant's and that of the IWFS
- To acknowledge and thank appropriately those who contribute and keep alive our wonderful organisation.

Let's spread the word. Contact Ruth Hurst, EAZ Awards Officer, with any queries or applications at awards.eaz@iwfs.org



Berkshire

ARGENTINIAN WINES PRESENTED BY ANDREW STEEL

Andrew Steel has an impressive CV covering 45 years in the wine trade. He started by picking grapes in France but spent much of his career with Champagne Houses including Lanson and Bollinger. He now runs The Tasting Barn in Wokingham and is the sole UK importer of Gauchezco wines.

The winery was founded in 1881 by the Governor of Mendoza Tiburcio Benegas but Gauchezco is now owned by Eric Anesi from Colorado. He has vineyards in Maipu and the Uco Valley in Mendoza Province and at 3-4000 feet at Cafayate in Salta Province. Many of the vines are un-grafted having originally been imported to Argentina as cuttings from Bordeaux by the Governor, making them now more than 100 years old.

Andrew brought with him a good selection of Gauchezco wines and one blend from another producer for comparison. We started with a Pinot Noir sparkling Rosé made by the Charmat method which proved to be popular and at 11% very drinkable. Then we moved onto a new product called Sparkling Dulce Natural. A part fermented grape juice which at 8.5% alcohol could be drunk all day – on our table we wondered whether a slug of gin would be appropriate ?

Really the only white grape grown in Argentina is Torrontés and the first white from Para Dos blended this with Sauvignon Blanc. Much more successful was the 100% Torrontés from Gauchezco which we enjoyed with Mark’s starter of Cheese Empanadas.

Time to get into the reds! Whilst Argentina has specialised in Malbec, other red varietals are grown successfully and so we tasted a Pinot Noir Estate wine from 2021. Then the first of the Malbecs, a 2020 Reserve. This upped the game a bit being made from vines with 1888 rootstock which were 40/50 years old. This vineyard gets lots of sunshine but also has cold nights and produces an almost black wine which is smooth, thanks to the light touch of American and Hungarian oak with good fruit and a long dry finish.



The 20% of Cabernet Franc in the next blend is from 120-year-old vines which partnered with Malbec from 60/70-year-old vines imparts an even blacker colour, some leather on the nose and a mouth-filling, spicy experience. Excellent!

Chef Mark had created a superb beef stew chimichurri for our supper served with crushed potatoes and buttered cabbage. This was complemented with a 2019 Reserve Petit Verdot whose dryness worked well with food.

The final Hurrah was a 2020 Malbec from the Gauchezco Oro range using 100-year-old vines to produce a top scoring wine, albeit with a price to match!



In summary there was a lot to enjoy amongst the reds and Andrew also has a single varietal Cabernet France which must be tried at some point. Most were available at acceptable prices for today’s market. Thanks must go to Andrew for his knowledgeable presentation and to Chef Mark for his well-chosen accompanying food.

Chris Graham

Devonshire

DINNER AT RODEAN RESTAURANT

On 17th October 2024, 24 Members and one guest sat down to an excellent dinner at Rodean Restaurant, Kenton, organised by Geeta and Gordon Lloyd. A planned visit to this venue in October 2023 had had to be cancelled due to serious flooding in the village.

The restaurant is virtually next door to Powderham Castle, the seat of the Earl of Devon, and just seven miles from Exeter. Lizzie and Matthew Tilt have been running the business since 1999 with Lizzie front of house and Matthew the Chef Proprietor.

On arrival members nibbled on simple canapés with a glass of Crémant d'Alsace Extra Brut Prestige Domaine Paul Ginglinger 2021, followed by an Amuse Bouche.

Starters were chosen from either cured wood pigeon breast with roasted fig chutney and crispy brioche croutons or torched gravlax, Earl Grey tea and toasted coriander cured chalk stream trout with crispy hash brown. The starters were served with The Wine Society's Generation Series Mâcon-Villages 2022.

The main course options were either roasted guinea fowl breast with crushed new potatoes and savoy cabbage and a smoked bacon wild mushroom creamed sauce, or pork tenderloin with a pork belly and cheek croquette and leek & black garlic roast apple, or 'Today's Catch', i.e. locally caught day boat fish, which was the most popular option. The accompanying wine was Chinon 'Le Temps des Cerises', Domaine de la Noblaie 2023.



To finish the evening there was a choice of either a classic vanilla Crème Brûlée, fresh berries brandy snap, or a Warm Sticky Ginger Pudding with ginger beer sauce, clotted cream ice cream, or the Westcountry Cheese biscuits with fruit jelly.

At the end of an excellent meal, David Rowe, Devonshire Branch Chairman, presented the new **IWFS Excellence Award Sticker and Certificate** to Lizzie and Matthew, in recognition of Rodean Restaurant's excellent food and service. A small stock of IWFS business cards and publicity leaflets were also given to Rodean to be made available upon request.

Geeta Lloyd

Devonshire

ROYAL TORBAY YACHT CLUB

21 members attended the dinner at the Royal Torbay Yacht Club, Torquay on 26th November 2024, organised by Heather Bignell-Blye and Kenneth Turner.

The room was festively decked, and we started off with a glass or two of Langlois Crémant de Loire Brut with some lovely canapés.



After grace, we sat down to a choice of Heirloom Tomato and Mozzarella with balsamic dressing and fresh basil or Pressed Ham Hock Terrine with port pickled onions and piccalilli or Smoked Mackerel Paté, Celeriac Remoulade and focaccia. The accompanying wine was Mâcon-Lugny, Les Genièvres, Louis Latour.

The main course was Salmon Fillet with crushed New Potatoes, Tender Stem Broccoli, Tarragon Sauce or Fillet of Beef with Dauphinoise Potatoes, Roast Carrots, Spinach, Demi-Glace. (There was a vegetarian choice which nobody selected). The main course was served with a M. Chapoutier, Côtes du Rhône.

To finish the meal we had Peanut Butter Brownie with Ice Cream or Raspberry Cheese Cake with fresh berries or Cheese with biscuits, chutney and grapes, followed by tea and coffee.

But it didn't end there. Our chairman David Rowe announced that The Royal Torbay Yacht Club was his second home and, if he were at home, he would serve a port to finish the evening! So he generously offered a glass of port to all the members present to round off a superb evening.

Geeta Lloyd

Devonshire THE LINNY



On 19th December 2024, 20 members from IWFS Devonshire branch sat down to a superb meal at The Linny at Coffinswell, a fourteenth century thatched country inn situated in the heart of a local village.

On arrival we were offered Ruggeri Giall'Oro Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG together with nibbles. We then progressed to starters with options of either butternut squash soup with parsnip crisps or wild mushrooms sautéed in brandy and cream with Hylsten sourdough or prawn cocktail with Marie Rose sauce and iceberg lettuce, washed down with Luvignac Picpoul de Pinet St Clair 2023.

The main courses were chosen from either Angus beef brisket, root vegetables, red wine jus and creamy mash or plaice fillets, tender-stem broccoli, jersey royals with thermidor sauce or Rosamondford turkey, pork chipolata, sage and onion stuffing, seasonal vegetables and roast potatoes accompanied by Scotti Old Vine Zinfandel, 2017 Lodi.

We finished the evening with options of either chocolate torte with honeycomb ice-cream or Baileys and coffee ice-cream with almond tuille or a cheeseboard with a variety of artisan crackers and caramelised red onion chutney.

Geeta and Dr Gordon Lloyd



Herefordshire & Monmouthshire

CHRISTMAS DINNER AT ST PIERRE HOTEL AND GOLF CLUB, CHEPSTOW

The St Pierre estate takes its name from the head of the de St Pierre family, who was granted the estate for his unwavering loyalty in the Battle of Hastings. King Henry V, who was born in Monmouth, also played a role in the history, as he deposited the Crown Jewels with Sir David de St Pierre as security for a loan to continue the war with France. In the late fifteenth century, the Lewis family became the new owners of the estate and completed the construction of the present mansion and tower. The Lewis family resided in the grand house until 1839, when it was eventually taken over during World War II to shelter children from the effects of the Blitz. This marked the end of the family life in the estate's great house. It was acquired by Marriott International in 1996 as a 4-star Hotel and Golf Club.

A quarter mile tree lined drive draws you to the gated courtyard entrance of this superb example of a medieval manor house which retains many original features internally. This was our Christmas venue for 2024 where dinner was served in a private room just off the original banqueting hall.

We were delighted to welcome John and Joan Nicholas and guests from Bath and Bristol, Wessex and also Manchester branches.

The menu was an inspired interpretation of traditional seasonal fare, all served seamlessly under the guidance of Gemma, the restaurant manager.

Highlights of the menu

To start

- Spiced butternut squash, coriander coconut soup with herb croutons
- Mustard infused ham hock terrine, curried honey apricot chutney frisée salad with herb oil and toasted focaccia.
- Glazed rosary goats cheese and vanilla poached pear, pickled shallots baby leaf and candied walnuts.

To follow

- Pan fried chicken supreme wrapped in bacon stuffed with a sage, turkey and caramelised onion mousse, or
- Slow cooked brisket beef, or



- Smoked cheese, spinach and celeriac filo present. Each served with Brussel sprouts and cranberry, chargrill carrots, smoked parsnip purée with a roast potato hash.
- or,
- Chalk stream trout, clam, spinach and samphire beurre blanc.

To finish

- Chocolate mousse, mulled wine compote and shortbread biscuits
- Baileys and Christmas pudding festive cheesecake glass
- Roast apple, cinnamon and Welsh-cake trifle.

Wines

For the table we selected from what was a limited wine list offered by the hotel but both the red Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Parini and the white Vidal Estate Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough NZ complemented the food well.

Many stayed overnight and we met at breakfast (for more food!) and to wish all a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Sue Smith



Herefordshire & Monmouthshire A COUNTRY LUNCH

Midway between Ledbury and Hereford is the hamlet of Trumpet. And, barely visible from the road, is Verzon House Hotel, a 'restaurant with rooms' where the dining areas and bar are richly decorated with hunting trophies and equestrian paraphernalia. A 12-pointer Royal stag gazed down imperiously from its vantage point over the mantel of a blazing log fire as guests enjoyed a stirrup cup of Simpatico prosecco on arrival in the ante room to the refectory, itself displaying a collection of saddles and stuffed raptors.



A couple of times each year our branch arranges 'pay as you go' events. This time guests were invited to select their gastronomic preferences, in advance, from the prix fixe menu and then settle their own accounts on the day: to enhance these occasions the branch hosts the apéritifs and the table wines.

IWFS Lunch Menu

Starters

- Red wine poached pears and crumbled stilton with candied walnuts, cranberry vinaigrette
- Soup of the day served with toasted focaccia
- Parma ham, cinnamon grilled figs and rocket fig gel, balsamic, toasted seeds, parmesan crisps, crème fraîche
- Wye Valley smoked salmon with cucumber, dill, crème fraîche, salmon caviar, garden fresh herbs, preserved lemons

Mains

- Duet of beef grilled 4oz bistro steak and garlic and herb braised beef served with mashed potatoes, roasted root vegetables, caramelized brussel sprouts and a red wine sauce
- Herb and garlic pan roasted 4oz breast of chicken, Willy's Eureka glazed new potatoes, roasted root vegetables, brussel sprouts, herb sauce
- Crispy seared 4oz stone bass, cream and chive crushed potato, root vegetables, brussel sprouts, thyme butter sauce
- Butternut squash three ways, spice roasted butternut squash, coconut and ginger butternut purée, crispy butternut, pomegranate, sautéed kale and drizzled with a chilli and garlic peanut sauce



Desserts

- Velvety chocolate tart with chantilly cream, crunchy honeycomb, vanilla and citrus sauce
- Lemon meringue topped with Italian meringue and torched
- Cinnamon roasted apple galette, vanilla ice cream served with caramel sauce
- Cheese board, an assortment of local cheeses with house made chutney and crackers

Lunch took a leisurely, easily digestible, three hours with the flow of conversation matched by the flow of wine. We chose the 'house wines' and were not disappointed. We are fortunate in having members who, in turns, take responsibility for the driving in our area where public transport is an endangered, nearly extinct, species. From our group there was only one adverse comment – the chicken was passed retirement age – the chef was consulted and equanimity restored. This was the first occasion we had visited this establishment and I suspect not the last.

Sue Smith



Herefordshire & Monmouthshire BUFFET LUNCH BELARUS STYLE

We are regularly delighted at our branch to welcome Tim and Natasha, both members of Bath & Bristol, who live in The Forest of Dean which is equidistant from both branches. Natasha has lived in UK for around 20 years but was brought up in Belarus. At home she is an expert gardener who tends a range of organically grown crops from capsicum to peaches via brassicas, herbs, several varieties of tomatoes and aubergines. Natasha loves to cook so we invited her to prepare a buffet lunch reflecting the cuisine of Belarus, which we presented to 25 members (from both branches) at our home in Raglan. Natasha's mum had visited UK recently and had sourced some items from Belarus for authenticity.

On the day the result was amazing. I list the menu for your delight:

On arrival, blinies (red caviar and cold smoked salmon) with Moldovian sparkling wine

On the tables, individual shots of traditional herb infused vodka served with rye bread and cured pork belly / homemade pork sausage and pickle canapés for a traditional Belarusian toast 'Nostrovia'.

The Main Buffet offered a vast array:

- Open cabbage pie, open tuna and anchovy pie, open meat pie, mushroom quiche
- Quiche Lorraine, potato salad, salmon pasta salad, Belarusian meat salad
- Belarusian vegetable salad, selection of cold meats and cheese
- White bread and rye bread with caraway seed rolls, Belarusian rye bread
- With a selection of Natasha's homemade pickles

For Dessert

- Belarusian style Perry pear and almond tart served with ice cream

Then black tea with lemon and assorted home-made chocolates and coffee enhanced with a Belarusian balsam (rich in composition, currant balsam is made on the basis of 16 ingredients. It mixed Lux alcohol, alcoholised blackcurrant juice, alcoholised rosehip and apple juice drinks, alcoholised infusions of linden flowers, peppermint, propolis and natural honey).



We served five wines sourced from the Wine Society – their notes:

Moldova – Vin Spumant Milestii Mici Moldova de Lux Demi-sec Alb

Produced according to the Charmat method, by blending European white wines. The wine has a straw-golden colour. The aroma is rich in nuances of flowers and fresh fruits. The noble and elegant taste combines perfectly with salads, brie cheese, bruschetta.

Georgia – Red wine Schuchmann Doqi Saperavi, Kakheti 2022

An excellent example of Georgia's native saperavi grape. This is full-bodied but with juicy blueberry, plum and blackcurrant fruit. It has the grape's characteristic spice on the palate with a silky, plush texture.

Hungary – White Wine Furmint, Balassa, Tokaji 2022

Opulent oaked furmint from Balassa Winery based in the centre of Tokaji in Hungary. This substantial white is sourced from five separate vineyard plots and spends six months in oak barrels. The result is an intensely aromatic wine with aromas of nutmeg, orchard fruit and cedar and a full, rich palate.

Georgia – White Wine Didebuli Kakheti Orange Kisi 2022

Orange wine from Georgia made from the little-known local white grape variety, kisi. Fresh, with delicate nuttiness, spices, citrus and orange-peel notes with medium tannins that make it enjoyable with food.

Moldova – Red Wine Individuo Merlot-Cabernet Sauvignon 2021

This Moldovan Bordeaux blend, made by one of Moldova's benchmark producers, the award-winning Château Vartely, is a great success. It delivers exuberant notes of cassis, red plums and blackberries with subtle liquorice spice that adds interesting layers to this primarily fruity and accessible red wine.

The wines were unfamiliar, each well received with the possible exception of the Orange Kisi which several guests found did not suit their taste.

Several indulgent hours passed – there had been generous offerings of the goodies and guests departed with 'doggy' bags as souvenirs of their Belarusian odyssey.

Sue Smith

Liverpool

BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU – ‘AU NATUREL’



Apparently Beaujolais Nouveau is hip again and apparently it is also cool to drink natural wines, just saying! So the Liverpool branch nailed it when we celebrated Beaujolais Nouveau Day at the French Queens Bistro, Liverpool, with wines from the Jean-Paul Brun Estate.

Beaujolais first captured the public imagination with Beaujolais Nouveau a style of wine that was young, fruity and smelt more like bubble-gum and bananas than wine. Jean-Paul hated this style and wanted to make wine in a more traditional way that expressed the grape and the terroir; enter Natural Wines.

Some sources claim that the natural wines movement started with winemakers in the Beaujolais region of France in the 1960s and Jean-Paul has always farmed organically. He steers clear of manipulating the wines via carbon maceration, thermo-ventilation and yeast inoculation which have become the norm in Beaujolais. He also believes his wines taste better at lower alcohol levels so does not add extra sugar (chaptalisation) to raise alcohol levels.



The result as we found out are wines that have great complexity along with the juicy, almost sappy, fruit associated with Beaujolais.

First out, of course, was the Beaujolais Nouveau 2024, a Nouveau ‘Scotty, but not as we know it’. It tasted more mature for its age and gone were the bubble-gum notes. What we were left with was an extremely drinkable fruity Beaujolais Nouveau.

The starter course was a delightful French-style Ham Hock Terrine, served with caramelised apple and a potato salad. This was accompanied by Jean-Paul Brun Terres Dorées Beaujolais Blanc, a 100% chardonnay.

The main course was Roast Chicken Supreme, accompanied by celeriac fondant, broccoli purée and florets, new roast potatoes and honeyed roasted parsnips which were to die for. The wine was Jean-Paul Brun’s which with its light tannins worked perfectly with the food.

Dessert, a rich and decadent Chocolate Delice with orange, a cherry sorbet and roasted hazelnuts.

Lucas, our host and proprietor, looked after us superbly and gave us a knowledgeable insight into natural wines and the Jean-Paul Brun wine selection for tonight. Even though there weren’t so many members attending as usual, the French Queen’s Bistro private room made for an intimate and cordial dining experience.

Chairman Terry Lim and Events Organiser Ysanne Williams along with all those attending thanked Lucas and the chefs for a fantastic authentic Beaujolais Day.

Nigel Williams

Liverpool

GETS THEIR JUST DESSERTS ON A PLATE

Paul Askew, chef patron and owner of the Art School Restaurant, welcomed the Liverpool Branch for their Christmas Lunch.

Paul has owned The Art School in Liverpool for the last 10 years creating classic and innovative fine-dining experiences. His focus remains fixed on bringing the highest standard of gastronomy to Liverpool and to showcase just how far the city can go.

As part of his wider work Paul is a fellow of the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts and their Chairman for the North of England. He is a Disciple of Escoffier and patron of the recent Taste Liverpool.



focuses on paying tribute to his late mother and creating a warm homely environment (Moriarty was Paul Askew mother's nickname).

On arrival

A glass of Hennes English sparkling wine with Gordal olives

Amuse bouche

Sweetcorn Velouté, served with Art School bread and dulce and Lancashire raw milk butters

To start

Croquette of salt-aged miso Cumbrian duck leg with spiced plum dressing

Wine: *Podere Castorani, Chardonnay D'Abruzzo, Italy*

Main

Cutlet of salt-aged Cumbrian Middle White pork with a Southport smoked pork wrapped potato, apple and prune gateau, pork fat carrot confit, baby Brussels sprouts and green peppercorn sauce

Wine: *Podere Castorani, Cadetto Montepulciano D'Abruzzo, Italy*

Dessert

A trio of festive Art School signature desserts

Nigel Williams



So we knew we were in for a very nice time and the Liverpool Branch were joined by members from the Merseyside and Mid-Cheshire branch along with Ron Barker from the Blackpool Branch.

Lunch was served in The Moriarty Private Dining Room; sumptuous, intimate surroundings that are beautifully appointed with stunning finishes and artefacts from the Askew family's global travels. The Moriarty Private Dining Room

London

FINE MATURE WINES FROM A MEMBER'S CELLAR

London Branch members had a unique opportunity to taste wines from the cellar of our long established member, Richard Duncan, who spent many years in the wine trade and has a superb collection. The tasting was held at the Army and Navy Club in Pall Mall. The wines were presented by Richard and another long established, knowledgeable and experienced member, Christopher Davenport Jones.

Sherry V.V.O. Oloroso – Sandeman Hnos y Cia

Such a great pleasure to drink this Very Very Old Oloroso sherry, made from wines of vintages averaging 24 years old. Since Richard bought it at Christies in 1982, this means 24 years back

from that year. It was super rich, beautifully opulent, with length.

1970 Cahors Clos de Gamot – Jouffreau et Fils

This was included as a curiosity. At the time in the sale catalogue, these wines were described as 'black wines'. Clos de Gamot is an old vineyard planted with Malbec, the terroir being calcareous clay-siliceous, with pebbles and flints, and alluvium of the river Lot. The family Jouffreau has been growing wine there since the seventeenth century. Clos de Gamot produces wines for laying down. However, not surprisingly, this particular vintage, although a good colour, had dried out, and the aromas and flavours were not appealing. Yet it was still drinkable.



Following on, the wines were tasted in pairs.

**1999 Nuits-St-Georges Clos des Porrets-St Georges –
Domaine Henri Gouges**

Henri Gouges is a top grower in Nuits St Georges with fourteen hectares of vines. The family has been vineyard proprietors for generations, and proprietors of the current domaine since 1919. The wines are expected to age long term. However, this wine was difficult to get into and past its best.

1999 Volnay Champans – Domaine Marquis d'Angerville

The domaine has been in the Angerville family for generations. Jacques d'Angerville was renowned in Volnay, making wine from 1952 until he died in 2003, therefore including this vintage. The wine was produced from low yields, with intensity and length, and capable of long ageing. This bottle showed far better flavours and was ready to drink. It was classic Volnay, quite light with softened tannins and harmonious fruit.

**1983 Château d'Issan, Margaux
1985 Château d'Issan, Margaux**

The reputation of this wine goes back to the twelfth century, when it was reportedly served at the wedding of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry Plantagenet, future King Henry II – centuries before its 1855 classification as a 3rd Grand Cru Classé. Much more recently, after the Second World War, the estate was revived and the vineyards replanted. The Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blend is from old vines grown on a terroir of gravel on top of clay subsoil, with easy drainage by being near the Gironde Estuary.

1983 was generally very good for Bordeaux, and especially in Margaux. The best wines showed richness but many were not for keeping beyond twenty or so years.

The 1985 vintage in Bordeaux was superb, particularly for red wine, and is described as elegant, refined and balanced.

Both these Château d'Issan vintages have been very highly rated. They both tasted well, the 1985 being better, and easier to drink.

**1991 Ridge California Geyserville
1991 Ridge California Zinfandel Lytton Spring**

Ridge Vineyards were among the first to champion old-vine Zinfandel in 1964. Some of the vines behind this Zinfandel-dominated blend are over 130 years old. They focus on single vineyards.

Their oldest vines grow in Geyserville, some 130 years old, contributing to a unique intensity and complexity. The soil is deep gravel loam with large rocks, permitting excellent drainage while also allowing heat retention, imparting a mineral quality. 50% Zinfandel, 30% Carignan, 20% Petite Sirah.

Lytton Springs soils are predominantly gravelly clay, retaining moisture and facilitating slow ripening. There are vines of up to 100 years of age. 80% Zinfandel, 12% Petite Sirah, 5% Grenache, 3% Carignan.

Both these wines age well. Both were delicious, showing good fruit.

Moving on to dessert wines:

**1989 Vouvray Le Marigny Moelleux – Domaine des
Aubuisières**

1995 Vouvray Le Marigny moelleux – Domaine des Aubuisières
Domaine des Aubuisières is a top site of Vouvray, and Le Marigny is exceptional. Clay-limestone.

100% Chenin Blanc.

1989 was a wonderful vintage, giving rich and concentrated wines, especially semi-sweet and sweet.

1995 was a great year.

The 1989 wine was classic, balanced, a very good nose and palate.



The 1995 wine was not quite so good. It was darker in colour, and sharper on the taste: an almond sweetness with conserved fruit, concentrated baked apples.

1976 Château Rieussec Sauternes

Rieussec was included as an interesting contrast to the Loire wines. The Vouvrays were better in showing more acidity with the fruit.

It has Château D'Yquem as a neighbour. Its terroir is gravel, sand, clay and limestone, and is one of the highest elevations in the appellation.

Mainly Sémillon with some Sauvignon Blanc.

1976 was an exceptionally hot year, which concentrated the ripening fruit, but with concomitant risks of drying out. Then the producers had to navigate heavy rains at harvest time. The humidity enabled botrytis to develop. There were some excellent Sauternes.

Rieussec is known for developing an unusually dark colour, as has this. It improves considerably with age, reaching maturity at 15-35 years of age or longer.

It tasted full, with depth, balanced and very sweet without cloying.

1953 Schloss Johannisberg Mauerchen Trockenbeerenauslese (Geisenheim)

The Schloss Johannisberg vineyards in Rheingau, Germany, were planted back in the ninth century in the days of the Roman Emperor Charlemagne. Since 1720, the entire domain has been devoted to Riesling – it is the world's oldest Riesling estate. Later that century Spätlese quality (from over-ripe fruit in a late harvest) was discovered here, and following this, Auslese, Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese. An oddity at this date, but worth trying from such a historic producer.

Even after all these delights, there were a couple of magnums of mature Rhônes to go with the buffet of cold meats, bread, cheese and salad.

What a privilege it was for us to taste the wines from these illustrious producers. Many grateful thanks to Richard and Christopher, and to our organiser, Beverley St John Aubin.

Rachel Burnett

London

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our AGM and Dinner was held at the Army and Navy Club in Pall Mall, London, starting with a glass of champagne. The formal business was concluded satisfactorily, followed by an enjoyable three-course meal and accompanying wines.

Prawn, Salmon and Spring Onion Tian with soured cucumber and relish, dill and caper crème fraîche.

Jean-Luc Colombo, La Redonne, Côtes du Rhône Blanc, Viognier and Roussanne, Rhône Valley, France 2021

Apple and Herb Encrusted Pork Loin, with leek mash, carrots, French beans and sage jus
Army & Navy Club Claret, Maison Sichel, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, Bordeaux, France 2021

Blackberry and Lemon Mousse with poached blackberries and shortbread biscuits.

Rachel Burnett



London

AN ECLECTIC SELECTION OF FINE WINES



The third tasting of wines from the cellar of the late Carole Goldberg for London Branch members, at the Army and Navy Club in Mayfair, was led by Rachel Burnett with grateful thanks to Roger Ellis who had inherited much of her extensive, but somewhat eccentric, wine collection, and who supplied the wines.

We were aware that, until we opened the bottles, we would not know how well these wines had stood the test of time and that we were taking a journey of discovery. Indeed one or two of them had not lasted well. But we also enjoyed the opportunity of tasting some exceptional gems at the optimum time.

Domaine Les Fines Graves Beaujolais-Villages Jacky Janodet 2010

The late Jacky Janodet was known as an artisan producer of first class Cru Beaujolais, practising sustainable farming, with a high percentage of old vines, averaging forty years of age grown on sandy soil. Today the domaine is run by his widow Evelyn and their son, Jérôme. Cru Beaujolais ages faster than most other wines although the best examples may be cellared for five years and, a good cru for up to several years longer. 2010 was a classic year. This wine was predictably past its peak but nevertheless drinkable.

Château Siran Saint-Jacques de Siran, Bordeaux Supérieure, 2009

This is one of the top estates in Margaux. This wine is from a special 11-hectare parcel just outside the Margaux appellation, the terroir here being clay topsoil over the sandy gravel subsoil. 48% Merlot, 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petit Verdot /Cabernet Franc. The 2009 vintage in Bordeaux was brilliant, a particularly ripe year resulting in concentrated alcoholic wines full of ripe fruit and tannins; tasting well.

Domaines Rollan de By, La Demoiselle de By, Médoc, 2009

This is the second wine of Château Rollan de By. 60% Merlot, 20% Petit Verdot 20% Cabernet Sauvignon & Cabernet Franc. Clay terroir with outcrops of gravel. Aged for twelve months in

20% American, 30% new French and 50% one year old oak barrels. However, the tannins were drying and about to take over any fruit.

Château Labegorce-Zédé, Margaux, 2003

Cabernet Sauvignon: 50%, Merlot: 35%, Cabernet Franc: 10%, Petit Verdot: 5%. Gravel and clay terroir. 2003 was the hottest vintage in Bordeaux until then. The grapes were picked earlier than almost ever before. The levels of sugar and therefore resulting alcohol reached record levels, and the tannin levels were relatively high. Many of the grapes shrivelled on the vine, missing the normal ripening process. The wines often lacked freshness and fruit. Successful wines were intense and complex. But often the wines could taste overcooked lacking freshness and fruit. This wine was tasting reasonably well although like most of this vintage beyond its prime.

Clos du Clocher Pomerol 2005

Clos du Clocher's largest plot is found on the top quality Pomerol plateau in the centre of Pomerol on the Right Bank of Bordeaux. The terroir is clay, gravel and sand soils on slopes reaching up to 30 metres; 75% Merlot and 25% Cabernet Franc. 2005 is one of Clos du Clocher's best vintages.

This wine was mature, sophisticated and appealing with velvety opulence and length.

Guigal Côtes du Rhône 2003

The Guigal family are one of the best producers in the Rhône. 50% Grenache, 25% Mourvedre, 25% Syrah from 35 year old vines aged for a year in oak casks. 2003 was a very hot summer in the Rhône and, as in Bordeaux, the vintage lacks consistency. Côtes du Rhône covers much of the Rhône Valley, a geologically diverse area with a wide range of meso-climates, soils and grape varieties. It is one of the largest single appellation regions in the world. Côtes du Rhône wines are for drinking on release and this wine was, not unexpectedly, over the hill.

Hermitage la Chapelle Jaboulet 1997

100% Syrah. La Chapelle has the reputation of being one of the world's best wines for cellaring.

1997 was a special vintage in the Northern Rhône. The wines from the finest vintages can age thirty years and more, starting to drink well only from about twenty years. The 1961 Jaboulet La Chapelle is a wine legend. Consequently we had high expectations for this wine but they were not met by the wine or, at least, this particular bottle although it was very acceptable. It is possibly worth noting that this 1997 vintage dates from the time between Gérard Jaboulet's retirement and death in 1995 and a new winemaker taking over in 1998.

Domaine du Château Gris Nuits-Saint-Georges 1er cru 2002

Château Gris is a small vineyard with a steep slope on the higher slopes of the Côte d'Or, facing East, so exposed to sunlight for the grapes to ripen despite being one of the most elevated and northerly sites in the area. It is unusually, in Burgundy, a terraced site to make it easier to work.

The soil is clay and rocky small limestone rocks covering a hard layer of limestone. The vines are an average age of over forty years. 100% Pinot Noir. 2002 was proclaimed as a very good year. This wine had a structured, mineral, elegant style with integrated oak which did not overpower the fruit and was a pleasure to drink.

'Le Petit Mouton' Château Mouton Rothschild Pauillac AOC 2005

This is Château Mouton Rothschild's second wine. A terroir of deep gravel and practically no clay. Some old vines. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon 20% Cabernet Franc 20% Merlot. 2005 is one of Château Mouton Rothschild's, and Pauillac's, best vintages. This was a lovely wine, ready now and would continue to evolve for drinking over the next decade and longer. Expressive and substantial, powerful, firm tannins, structured and balanced.

Rachel Burnett

London

CHRISTMAS DINNER AT THE BAKERS' HALL

London Branch Members happily gathered at Bakers' Hall, near the Tower of London, for our Christmas celebration. The Worshipful Company of Bakers has owned the site of Bakers' Hall since 1505 and has lost three previous Halls to fire, the first during the Great Fire of London which allegedly started in a bakery in nearby Pudding Lane.

Despite its now modern (but warmly welcoming!) Hall, the Bakers' Livery Company, 19th in the order of precedence, is one of the oldest City of London Liveries, with a history dating back over 800 years. The first known records of the existence of the Bakers' Guild are contained in the great 'Pipe Rolls' of Henry II which listed the yearly 'farm' paid to the Crown. It is shown that the Bakers of London paid a Mark of gold to the King's Exchequer for their Guild from 1155 AD onwards.

The excellent catering was provided by the caterers The Cook & The Butler (considered by some to be the best in the City).

Naturally we started with a drinks reception of Le Baron de Beaumont Blanc de Blancs. The sumptuous dinner consisted of:

- Cornish Fillet of Sea Bass in a crispy batter, caper and basil purée with saffron sauce
 - Roast Boned Quail stuffed with plum and cranberry, fondant potatoes, romanescos and purple cauliflower
 - Egremont Russet Caramelised Apple Tart with cinnamon crumble, honey crème anglaise and toffee ice cream
 - Stinking Bishop Cheese on granary croute with rocket salad and malted vinegar dressing
- followed by coffee or tea and chocolate truffles, and a glass of port or cognac.

The accompanying wines were:

- 2022 *Pardina/Chardonnay El Zafiro 2022*
- 2022 *Fincas de Azabache Rioja*.

This was a worthy start to our Christmas revelries, and many thanks to Roger Ellis who organised it all so well.

Rachel Burnett





London

GREEK WINES – AN EXCITING RENAISSANCE

“For wines that can truly surprise and excite in the glass, Greece really is the place to look.” Decanter wine magazine, July 2024. The 2024 Decanter World Wine Awards highlighted the ongoing ascendancy of Greek wines, which were awarded a large number of medals.

In a cold January we got together for a tasting from a warmer climate of some of Greece’s quality wines.

Many wineries are family owned, including several of those whose wines we were trying. The latest generation contribute their expertise from travelling and wine education abroad, building on developments introduced since the 1990s, such as sustainability and low intervention.

The Wine Society’s Greek White 2023

The first wine was mainly of Moschofilero, grown widely in the Peloponnese; light bodied, with high acidity and low alcohol, showing aromatic and floral qualities. It is frequently, as here, blended with some Roditis, which has more fruit and fewer aromatic and floral aspects. This wine makes an inexpensive but good value apéritif.

The next two white wines were both from the 2021 vintage of the Assyrtiko grape, Greece’s most celebrated white variety, native to the island of Santorini, where the wines have a unique richness and weight. It has a reputation for producing some of the world’s top wines.

Assyrtiko thrives in Santorini’s volcanic soil, which accentuates minerality and salinity, and its bleak, arid climate, with strong winds and minimal rainfall.

The wines are from low yields, high in acid, high in alcohol, full bodied, textured, not aromatic and can be bone dry, yet full of flavour. The flavours include citrus, stone fruits and minerality when young, developing into apricot, beeswax, toast and lanolin. It is normally fermented in stainless steel and aged on the lees to add weight and texture (for both these wines). However, a few producers do use oak.

On the island the grapevines are often grown near the ground, trained to weave into basket-shaped ‘koulouras’, like nests. These protect the grapes which grow inside, covered by the vine’s foliage, from the brutal winds.

The Society’s Exhibition Santorini Assyrtiko 2021

All Wine Society’s ‘Exhibition’ wines are made by top winemakers to be typical of the region they represent. This wine is 90% from 50-year old Assyrtiko grapes, with a contribution of a little Athiri (extensively planted throughout the Aegean) and Aidani (very rare). There were notes of citrus, stone fruit and apricot with salinity; and a good structure and finish.

Hatzidakis Skitali, Santorini 2021

Hatzidakis is one of the most renowned producers on Santorini, creating authentic artisan wines.

This wine was amazingly complex and rich, with aromas of citrus, beeswax and apricot, and a textured palate showing minerality. It has spent twelve months on its lees, giving it depth and texture. This wine cost over three times as much as the first Assyrtiko. The general view was that for value, the first was preferred.

Moving to red grapes, we compared two from Agiorgitiko, a versatile grape that can be produced in many styles. The best examples are fermented and aged in French oak. They are predominantly found in the Peloponnese, in Nemea.

Lafazanis Winery Geometria Agiorgitiko 2022

showed light and fruity, berry aromas and flavours.

Gaia Wines Agiorgitiko Nemea 2021

was more concentrated, with soft tannins.

Of the two, both well made, some of us preferred the first, others the second.

Douloufakis ‘Dafnios’ Liatiko 2019

This wine is from Crete, arguably Greece’s most exciting wine region and home to numerous indigenous varieties. It is 100% Liatiko, Crete’s finest red grape and one of its oldest, producing delicate, light to medium bodied wines in a variety of styles, mostly sweet, although increasingly dry (including this example).

It suffered a decline in popularity in the late twentieth century. However, Nikos Douloufakis, a third-generation vintner, who trained in Piedmont, planted new Liatiko vineyards in the early 1990s and experimented with the grapes, cultivation and styles to facilitate a revived popularity.

This wine had concentrated aromas and flavours of red fruits, also touches of spices and herbs, good acidity and integrated tannins from careful maturing in oak. It would evolve.

We liked this wine.

Next we tried two wines from Xinomavro, Greece’s top red grape. It thrives in Naoussa in Northern Greece. It tends to be a pale colour, high in acidity, high alcohol, aromatic, many tannins and ageing potential. The wines may be made to be light and easy drinking or more structured; whether traditional high acid and tannin, savoury dried fruit and spice, or modern sweeter acidity and fruit. Both these wines would age well.

Xinomavro Single Vineyard ‘Hedgehog’, Alpha Estate 2020

This wine demonstrated the characteristics of Xinomavro, with a bouquet of strawberry, redcurrants and plum fruit carried through to the palate, unobtrusive oak, and a good finish.

Kir Yianni Diaporos Single Vineyard Xinomavro 2018

Xinomavro 87%, Syrah 13%.

This wine had aromas of ripe black fruit, plums, and also dark chocolate and spice. Its flavours were of ripe fruit, cherry, plum

and tobacco, with a moderate tannic structure and a persistent finish.

Both wines, like all those shown, were from outstanding producers and showed well. The second was about twice the price of the first.

For our final wine, we returned to Santorini.

Santo Wines Mavrotragano 2020

Mavrotragano is Santorini's signature red grape, an old rare native variety, produced only in small amounts. It has excellent

ageing potential. The aroma is spicy and complex, ripe black fruit backed up by black pepper, juniper berries, and notes of vanilla and tobacco. The palate is intense, smooth and balanced: black fruit flavours, figs, and rounded tannins, with a long aftertaste. We appreciated this wine.

The wines tasted this evening illustrated indigenous grape varieties and diverse terroirs found nowhere else, from some of the best wine producers in Greece.

Rachel Burnett

Manchester

LUNCH AT SAM'S CHOP HOUSE

Manchester members met at Manchester's iconic Sam's Chop House established in 1872 – a shrine to L.S. Lowry. We were warmly greeted by George Bergier who welcomed us with a chilled fresh Tio Pepe Fino Sherry.

Our first course was roasted figs with Parma ham and goats' cheese on a bed of leaves dressed with balsamic vinegar. This was delicious crisp Parma ham encasing the cheese and figs with contrasting textures. Castellani Vernaccia di San Gimignano 2022 was served, an elegant, fragrant wine with a hint of lemon.



Main course was duck breast with rhubarb purée, greens and dauphinoise potatoes. The duck was served perfectly pink and the purée married very well with it. Leyda Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 was well received with its plum and cherry notes and a hint of tobacco.



Pudding was a pear and caramelised white chocolate galette, a melt in the mouth confection which was light and delicious.

A most enjoyable time was had by all and a huge thank you to George and all the staff.

Ronnie Costello





Manchester NOI QUATTRO

Manchester Branch members visited Noi Quattro in the Northern Quarter for a taste of Sicily. The evening started well with a glass of prosecco before we were escorted through to the tasting tables. Immediately we were in the capable hands of one of our newer members, Gary Newborough, who modestly shone through the tasting with his knowledge, organised expertise and gentle humour along with maps, tasting notes and a school bell!

The bell brought us all to order. Gary guided us through generous pourings of four different wines accompanied by four different street food courses so we could taste with and without food and compare. We were reminded of the seven Ss of wine tasting – see, swirl, sniff, sip, slurp, savour, spit/swallow.

Firstly Caponata, one of 37 varieties offered throughout Sicily. Ours was vegetable stew atop bruschetta which went down very well with our first white wine made from the native Sicilian grape Zibibbo, Taif Zibibbo Terre Siciliane. Somehow this wine caused a distinct increase in noise level and chatter amongst us until the bell quietened us and we were presented with Arancini and Kike Traminer Aromatica Terre Siciliane, fruity and flowery with a spicy nose, an altogether fuller and more intense wine.

Arancini, plural for rice balls, started a local semantic debate as to whether a single one has a masculine or feminine ending, 'o' or 'a'. Our single one was rather large, and in the shape of Mount Etna and therefore associated with nearby Catania. It had a delicious rich rice and four cheese centre and a very firm exterior. Some of our members thought it should have had more seasoning but most agreed it went well with the wine. By this time we were beginning to debate as loudly as any Italian with only the occasional arm waving towards the spittoons in the form of large decorative tomato tins.

Next came the Nero d'Avola, a grape planted all over Sicily in the 70s in all soil types, good and bad, when it was thought it could be made in volume and become the red Pinot Grigio. Our version fell somewhere between that sold in Aldi for £5 and that sold in Harvey Nicols for much more. It accompanied pizza topped with Norma sauce – this being ricotta cheese, tomatoes, basil and tons of aubergines – and named after the



Bellini Opera Norma. We learned that both the sauce and the opera were considered to be 'a masterpiece'. Our members thought the combination of this pizza and this wine to be excellent.

Our final course was a cannoli filled with cream and glacé cherries generously accompanied by an El Aziz Grillo donated by the wine merchant. The wine had an intense straw colour with aromas of ripe dried fruit such as pineapple, apricot and peach. It was felt to be soft and enveloping with honey and sweet spices and not as sweet as the wines from northern Sicily.

Gary held a vote on the wines. The red wine was voted favourite of the evening by just one vote, followed by the second white but what a wonderful evening of camaraderie, adventure and education we had! Thank you Gary and thank you to the staff at Noi Quattro.

Ruth Hurst



Manchester

CHRISTMAS LUNCH AT MANCHESTER HALL



It is a real pleasure to review another highly successful and very enjoyable IWFS Manchester branch event!

Members from other North West IWFS branches joined us and we made a lively group who enjoyed a convivial and absolutely delicious early Christmas lunch. Held at the Manchester Hall in the centre of the city it was a most agreeable way to celebrate the beginning of the festive season.

Manchester Hall is a beautiful, uniquely historic venue situated in the heart of Manchester. Formerly a Freemason Hall, it was designed in 1929 by architect Percy Scott Worthington. After having undergone a sensitive restoration it now combines traditional structure with contemporary glamour making it a truly delightful dining venue.

On arrival we were greeted with a glass of Vilarnau 'Gaudi' Organic Cava Brut Reserva Penedès, which proved to be the perfect apéritif with bright notes of crisp apple, ripe pear and brioche.

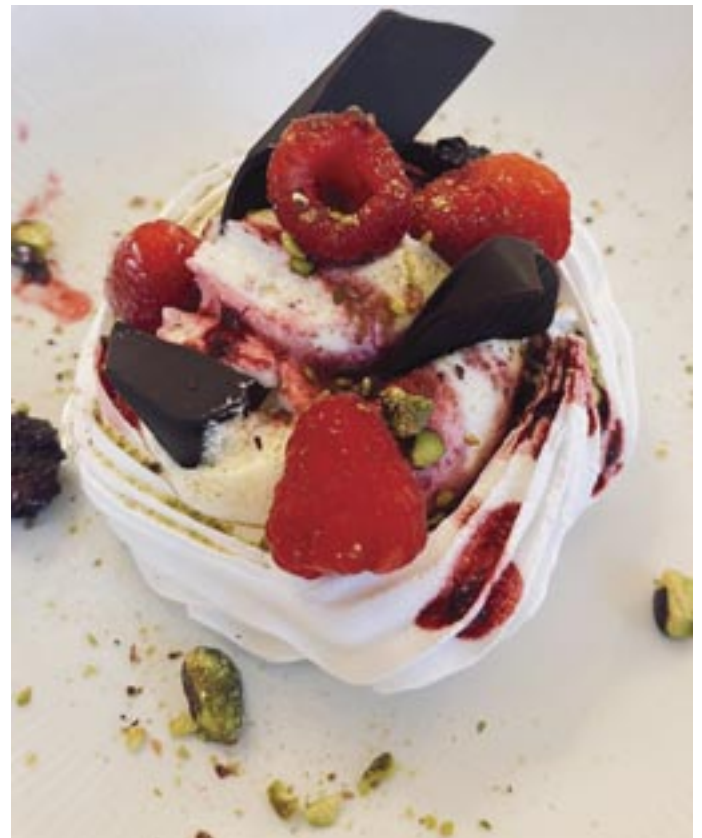
The lunch started with an artistically presented dish of Scottish smoked salmon, dill and cracked pepper cream, pickled cucumber ribbons, capers and shaved radish, which was perfectly complemented by a delicious 2023 Henri Erhart Riesling Réserve Particulière Alsace. Produced by the team at



the family-led winery Henri Ehrhart this classic French Riesling had bold notes of citrus and flowers with crisp refreshing acidity on the finish.

The Main Course of pork ballantine, fondant potatoes, squash purée, decorated with asparagus, was accompanied by a delightfully palate-enticing 2023 Domaine Mabileau Saint Nicolas de Bourgueil. Laurent Mabileau have been producing wines since 1985 and this wine, made from Cabernet Franc grapes, perfectly showcases their expertise. Produced in Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil on the right bank of the Loire Valley, it's a reminder that fantastic reds can be found here as well as whites. With notes of raspberry and wild strawberry together with silky tannins this proved to be a great pairing for both the meat dish plus the cheese course which followed.

The flavourful cheese course comprised Yarlington washed rind, spiced apple and whisky chutney, water biscuits with smoked almonds.



Our palates were then refreshed with Limoncello which was a perfect accompaniment to the very prettily presented dessert, complementing the sweetness of the raspberry pistachio pavlova decorated with dark chocolate shards.

Sincere thanks to the Committee for their hard work in organising this absolutely fabulous lunch! Also, a huge thank you to Chef Carlos and to Gary and Will on Wine and Front of House respectively together with their wonderful teams.

Dr Jane C Barber

Merseyside & Mid Cheshire **CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION**

Members, three new members and friends from Manchester Branch celebrated the start of the Christmas festivities with a black-tie dinner at The Aspire Restaurant in Trafford.

We were greeted with canapés to accompany a glass of festive fizz, the Society's Crémant d'Alsace 2020.

Before the meal, Chairman Tim Hodges presented Lorna McGibbon with the IWFS medal for Exceptional Service together with a certificate. For more than 20 years Lorna has provided invaluable assistance to successive Branch Treasurers.

The Menu

Two choices were offered for both the starter and main courses.

- Herb rolled ballotine of salmon served with saffron jelly, endive and a sour cream dressing.
- Herb rolled terrine of vegetables served with a Bloody Mary Jelly, endive and sour cream dressing.

Both starters were accompanied by a Generation Series Crémant de Loire 2020.

For the main course diners were offered either a choice of:

- Duo of Beef with an oxtail and root vegetable pudding, celeriac and truffle purée, Savoy cabbage and Maderia jus.
- Duo of Roots with a beetroot and mushroom pudding, with vegetables as above.

These were accompanied by Wine Society's Generation Series Barossa Shiraz 2023.

Dessert was a delicious Assiette of Miniature Desserts which were unanimously declared to be "truly scrumptious"!

The meal concluded with a selection of cheeses served with a 10-year-old Blandy's Verdelho followed by coffee and petit fours.



The service and presentation given by the students and their teachers was excellent and to be recommended. This college is a participator in the IWFS Catering Colleges Young Chef Competition.

Our members also joined in Christmas celebrations with the Manchester and Blackpool and Fylde Coast branches, both of which were very enjoyable.

Angela Britland



Merseyside & Mid Cheshire

CHINESE BANQUET AT THE SHANGHAI RESTAURANT

The branch celebrated summer with an Imperial Chinese Banquet at the Shanghai Restaurant in Chester. We have visited this restaurant many times over the years and it has never disappointed.

Members and friends from the Manchester Branch enjoyed the following dishes accompanied by Chilean Sauvignon Blanc and soft drinks.

The menu

Starters

- Tiger prawns with fruit sauce
- Chicken skewers with satay sauce
- Crispy spring rolls
- Crispy seaweed
- Crispy duck

Mains

- King Prawns with ginger and spring onions
- Lemon Chicken
- Sweet and sour chicken
- Spiced pork with noodles



- Beef with black bean and pepper sauce
- Chicken fried rice

The meal was completed with ice cream and banana fritters, tea and coffee.

Angela Britland



Merseyside & Mid Cheshire **NEW YEAR AT LA BOHEME**



The branch celebrated the New Year with a return to La Boheme, in Lymm – a perennial favourite.

Members and guests were joined by friends from the Manchester Branch and we enjoyed an excellent lunch prepared by Chef/Proprietor Olivier, accompanied by wines chosen by our Wine Steward, Paul Bishop.

The apéritif was a Crémant de Blanc from Alsace. Pinot Blanc, Dopff & Irion, was served with a choice of entrées: Terrine de Canard and Tarte aux Deux Saveurs.

For the main course the choice was Poulet a la Normandie or Rouge et Blanc, a serpentine of salmon and plaice, both served with a selection of vegetables and accompanied by Casa Silva Chardonnay Reserve,

Tarte aux Pomme served with a Calvados crème anglaise was chosen for dessert and the meal concluded with coffee and petit fours.

The gluten free adaptations were excellent.

The branch is looking forward to a varied programme of events in 2025, including our AGM and lunch at Buckleys in Warrington, the Panoramic Restaurant in Liverpool in March, a summer lunch and wine tasting in Great Budworth in June, a visit to a vineyard, near Conwy in July and many more still in the planning stage.

The Awards Lunch for the Catering College Competition will be taking place on 16th May 2025 at South Cheshire College in Crewe.

We would like to extend a very warm welcome to members from other branches to attend our events. We look forward to seeing you.

Angela Britland



Sussex

AN EVENING AT THE FIG TREE RESTAURANT



The Sussex Branch enjoyed an evening at the renowned Fig Tree Restaurant situated in the picturesque village of Hurstpierpoint close to the South Downs National Park.

This family-run restaurant owes its reputation to producing seasonal tasting menus that are continually changing using, where possible, locally sourced Sussex ingredients.

Sussex

THE BOLNEY STAGE

A pub that has been around since the days when, for many people, it was only a special occasion when they visited a restaurant. How things have changed from the memories of prawn cocktails and steaks with accompanying semi sweet German wines like Liebfraumilch and Blue Nun, which were listed on The Bolney Stage menu card dated from around the 1960s.

The Bolney Stage building dates back to the fifteenth century and when a new turnpike (Toll Road Gate) was erected in 1810 between the village of Pyecombe and Bolney one of the famous stage coaches of its time, named 'The Brighton Comet', would have passed right in front of the building on its way to London. Tonight the Sussex Branch members were the intrepid travellers arriving on our coach for the evening.

We dined on choices of entrées of salmon, pork belly or chicken pate with choices for the main course of duck, seabass or lamb, followed by desserts that seemed a bit reminiscent of the past with choices of damson sponge and vanilla custard, cheesecake, fruit salad or cheese. All served with a Picpoul De

They offer to their diners a unique experience of deliciously refined artistically arranged plates using always the freshest of ingredients in a very relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

The dishes produced certainly tempted our tastebuds and as usual it was a real treat to enjoy the dishes created.

Commencing with an apéritif of Vilarnau Cava Rosada (organic) with tasty canapés. One of the canapés had a taste of fish and chips which members wished could have been bigger as it was so delicious.

Then followed various choices of entrées but most people opted for the sea bass with a lobster bisque, sweetcorn and squash, the fish being very fresh and cooked to perfection.

Then came the main choices of dishes of lamb or salmon or a vegetarian choice – all beautifully presented without ignoring the quality of the food.

The desserts again demonstrated their culinary skill as one choice was a delicious Mango Soufflé served with a toasted coconut custard and a lychee sorbet.

The wines served with these courses were a St Jean des Sources Picpoul de Pinet Languedoc, France 2022 and a Sossego Alentejo Tinto Alentejo, Portugal 2022.

I am sure the Branch will be back at a future date.

Julie Wagg

Pinet, a crisp refreshing white wine, and a Red of Rare Vineyards Pinot Noir, described as having a velvety palate with cherry and blueberry flavours with a hint of sweet oak spice.

We all had a jolly evening embraced in the wonderful cosy atmosphere of this pub with its inglenook log fires and its crooked low beamed ceilings.

Julie Wagg





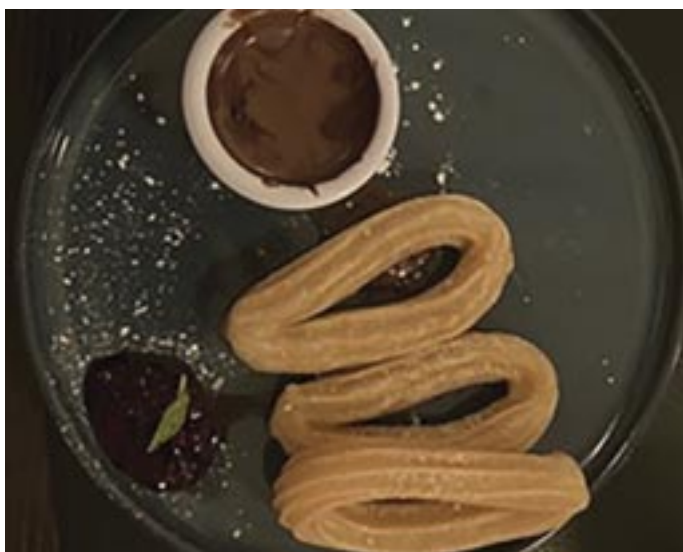
Sussex

VISITING PAMPA

The Sussex Branch had the delight of visiting a new venue situated in the picturesque Sussex village of Cuckfield.

Pampa is an Argentinian restaurant run and staffed by an Argentinian family. David and Lesley Berry, who run the Sussex Branch, had stated in their newsletter: "It is not just steaks!"

Although many people chose to have the delicious Argentinian steaks there were other options including fresh fillet of wild hake served with fish fumet, butter, lemon juice and herbs and homemade lobster meat ravioli accompanied by seafood velouté sauce. There were also some traditional Argentinian homemade foods like Empanadas, Argentinian pasties. Churros were served as a dessert with chocolate sauce.



The wines served were Amauta El porvenir, Torrontes Salta, Argentina and Amauta Absoluto, Malbec Salta, Argentina.

It was a new experience for a few members who were not familiar with the cuisine and we had a very enjoyable evening with the friendly and welcoming family.

Julie Wagg

Sussex

AN EVENING AT OCKENDEN MANOR FOR CHRISTMAS



The Christmas Season arrived and, to the delight of the Sussex Branch, we were once again able to celebrate the occasion at the Ockenden Manor Hotel – an Elizabethan Manor house situated in the picturesque village of Cuckfield that comes into its own at Christmas with its open log fires and wooden panelling enhanced in all its splendour with beautifully decorated Christmas Trees.

Whilst the dinner was not the traditional Christmas dinner, the guests were offered entrées of home made duck liver parfait or home smoked Loch Duart salmon with a main course of either

braised short rib of beef or roast turbot. However, traditional pudding was amongst the choices for dessert.

We were able to have our own private room and reception area where we were greeted by a glass of sparkling wine from the local Ridgeview Vineyard in Sussex and with the meal the wines served were Domaine les Yeuses Vermentino 2021 and Meridia Rubicone, Indicazione Geographica Tipica Sangiovese 2021 Italy.

The service was impeccable and ran like clockwork. We thoroughly enjoyed the beautifully cooked and delicious dishes that we have come to expect from this hotel. The hotel is renowned for its first class restaurant using only the finest locally sourced ingredients.

By the time the evening came to a close I think we were all a bit reluctant to leave having become totally immersed in the Christmas atmosphere.

Julie Wagg

Vale Royal LUNCH AT MOOR HALL



In late September the Vale Royal branch enjoyed a fantastic lunch at Moor Hall in Lancashire.

The Restaurant holds two Michelin Stars, a Michelin Green Star and five AA Rosettes. Mark Birchall the Chef Patron and former Roux Scholar was present on the day and we were greeted and warmly welcomed on arrival by Adam Wilkinson the General Manager.

As we are a small branch we are lucky on occasions like this to book the private dining facilities of some restaurants. The room was bright with an enormous bay window letting in the late summer sunshine. We began with a glass of Pierre Peters Grand

Cru Champagne and once everyone had arrived we began with the charcuterie and canapés with more Champagne.

The menu was superb, with the monkfish being a highlight around the table. We had an additional cheese course after the lamb that led nicely into the two desserts.

The wines included a delicious New Zealand Chardonnay and a well-rounded Spanish Rioja, finishing with a wonderful aromatic German Riesling. The experience of food, wine, service and venue all contributed to amazing experience.

Ali Graham

Vale Royal DINNER AT BACCHUS

The last event of 2024 for the Vale Royal branch was a dinner in November at Bacchus in Prestbury. The Chef had created for us a five course dinner and Mike, the Restaurant Manager, paired each course with a superb wine.

We began the evening in their first floor private dining room with Vonderling Little Sparkle – Voor Paardeberg, South Africa, accompanied by a selection of delicate canapés.

We then took our seats and started with Twice Baked Cheddar Cheese Soufflé served with Waldorf Salad and a beautifully selected Albarino. The soufflé was delicious, extremely light and tasty, the Albarino was my favourite wine on the night. We continued with the courses, each one a delight. The main course was a choice between a Duo of Lamb or Parma Ham Wrapped Chicken Breast, everyone enjoyed the accompanying Pinot Noir with both dishes.

After the dessert, we had large plates of cheese and a stunning bottle of Vintage Port to end a wonderful winter's evening.

Ali Graham



Zurich

HISTORIC BODEGA IN OLD TOWN ZURICH

Two members of the Zurich Branch live in Barcelona, Spain, and have set up already twice, and with acclaimed success, a wine festival in and around Barcelona. This time, the branch has spent an evening in the Bodega Española, a landmark of Spanish wine and culinary tradition since 1874. Décor and servings have virtually not changed since. The restaurant, the Sala Moriesca, has been built in 1892.

After tasting the Cava in the nearby wine cellar and having some Tapas, we had an introduction to the specific Bodega wines, which are exclusively served (and not sold) in the Bodega. They are just called 'Bodega Blanco' and 'Bodega Tinto' and are 'Vini del la Tierra de Castillo'. However, they fitted well with the Paella.

The meal was classic for the place: 'Crema de Calabaza' (pumpkin soup), 'Nuestra Paella' and a 'Flan Bodega'. The food



was nice, but the atmosphere was great. The attending members were truly inspired by the Catalanian atmosphere, and enjoyed a great evening.

Kurt Haering



Zurich

AGM 2024 OVERLOOKING ZURICH

The AGM of the Zurich Branch is traditionally a lunch followed or preceded by the formal meeting. The 2024 AGM was with a brunch in the 'Schützenhaus Albigüetli' a history loaded place where the Swiss train and compete their art of military rifle usage. However, the place was actually peaceful. It was a sunny day with a marvellous view of the full panorama from the city of Zurich into the Alps.

The brunch was in principle an extended classic breakfast with rich flow of Prosecco to complete 'wine and food'.

The AGM is a compulsory exercise for an association in Switzerland. The organisation is stable, the finances are sound. The only issue is the reluctance of younger members to take over active responsibilities to ensure the continuity of the Branch. But we are positive, that we will find ways for a future.

Kurt Haering



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

UPCOMING FESTIVAL

UK Bristol South West

12th to 14th September 2025

Europe Africa AGM and Festival Weekend. Please keep this month in mind to join us in the UK. We will be inviting all members, including those from Asia Pacific and Americas, to join us. The highlight will be a formal dinner at the impressive, medieval Thornbury Castle (between Gloucester and Bristol) on Friday 12th. Situated in the beautiful Avon countryside, you can enjoy the splendour of this Relais & Chateaux retreat. Watch this space for details.

BRANCH EVENTS

UK Capital

2nd April 2025

Cellar Series: Barolo and Barbaresco at 67 Pall Mall, London from 6.30-10.30 pm. For more go to <https://www.iwfs.capital/events-1>.

UK West Yorkshire

5th April 2025

Courtyard Dairy, Austwick. Join us for a daytime visit to this award-winning dairy. A talk from the Head Cheesemonger will guide us through a variety of British and local cheeses. To include talk and cheese tasting. Contact Sue Timme at suetimme@gmail.com for details.

UK Blackpool & Fylde

7th April 2025

Join us for a tasting of South African wines presented by Preet Sahota of Edgmond Wines. The event will be held at Aysgarth Court, Blackpool 7.00 for 7.30 Details from Ron Barker via ronbarker@hotmail.co.uk.

UK Sussex

10th April 2025

We are having our AGM and dinner at the Hove Club, Hove. Contact Lesley Berry iwfs_sussex@yahoo.co.uk for details.

UK Bath & Bristol

13th May 2025

It's our 75th birthday! We shall be celebrating with a Black-Tie dinner at The Holcombe, near Radstock. Accommodation available. We cannot promise to accommodate guests but we will if we can. Contact Leonie Allday for details chair.bathbristoliwfs@gmail.com

UK London

15th May 2025

A tasting of fortified wines and liqueurs. See www.iwfs.london for further details.

UK Northern Branches

16th May 2025

The date of our Awards Lunch for our 2025 Young Chef Competition which will be held at Cheshire South College in Crewe. The judges decisions will be announced and prizes awarded. If you are interested in being part of the event contact Tim Hodges tim@new-pool.co.uk for details.

UK Berkshire

16th May 2025

Wines of Portugal with Kevin Hart of 79 North a leading importer of wines from Portugal. Contact Colin Mair, via email colin.mair@ntlworld.com for details.

UK London

20th May 2025

We are holding a Bordeaux wine dinner matched with prime vintage clarets. See www.iwfs.london for further details.

UK West Yorkshire

24th May 2025

Judgement of Paris – Minus One at Bardsey Village Hall. 49 years ago the outcome of a blind tasting held in Paris shocked the world of wine and heralded in a new era. Come and learn about the Judgement of Paris and take part in blind tasting of a series of wines. Who wins – you decide! Contact Sue Timme at suetimme@gmail.com for details.

FINLAND Helsinki

May 2025 (dates tbc)

In May we'll take a trip to Hungary to taste the magical Tokajii wines. For further details contact Jaana Keränen jaana.keranen@live.fi.

UK Bath & Bristol

21st June 2025

An indulgent afternoon tea and chocolate tasting at Stoberry House near Wells. We hope for a fine day to enable us to enjoy the beautiful gardens. Contact Leonie Allday at chair.bathbristoliwfs@gmail.com for details.

UK Merseyside & Mid Cheshire

21st June 2025

A wine tasting and lunch in the delightful village of Great Budworth. Contact Hilary Rylands hilaryrylands@talktalk.net for details.

UK Manchester

28th June 2025

The Black Friar, Manchester for a Summer Lunch. Contact Chris Redman at cdredman@talktalk.net for details.

UK Merseyside & Mid Cheshire

17th July 2025

We are heading to the Gwinllan Conwy Vineyard for a vineyard tour, wine tasting and lunch. Contact Hilary Rylands hilaryrylands@talktalk.net for details.

UK Devonshire

20th July 2025

Our AGM and lunch will be held at Geeta and Gordon Lloyd's home. Contact Geeta Lloyd at geetalloyd@gmail.com for details.

UK Bath & Bristol

20th July 2025

An informal early evening wine and cheese gathering, hopefully al fresco, at members' home Waldegrave House near Bristol. Contact Leonie Allday for details chair.bathbristoliwfs@gmail.com